# VCU
## Office of the Provost

# Virginia Commonwealth University

## Academic Affairs Handbook

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# Academic Affairs Handbook

# 2021-22

**Office of the Provost**

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# Table of Contents

# About the academic affairs handbook

The purpose of the academic affairs handbook is to provide operational transparency and facilitate collaboration between academic affairs and internal stakeholders, especially faculty, staff and administrators in academic units, and staff in academic support units.

## 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 off-cycle 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; accelerated and dual academic programs; microcredentials; 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, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# Glossary of terms

Accelerated bachelor's-to-master's degree program: A structured, university-approved opportunity for academically qualified students to consecutively earn their bachelor's and master's degrees in less time and at reduced cost compared to pursuing each as a standalone degree program. Accelerated programs apply up to 12 master's credit hours to the baccalaureate program, which are taken during a student's final undergraduate year.

Bulletin(s): The university's annually published catalog for undergraduate, graduate and first-professional students. Contain information about university policies/academic regulations, course descriptions and academic requirements for VCU's degree and certificate programs.

CAT (catalog): VCU's software platform for publishing the Bulletins. CAT is the repository for noncurricular information, such as overview text for schools, departments and programs, administration changes and contact information. CAT also receives and publishes information from the CIM (curriculum inventory management) system. (See CIM definition below.)

CIM (curriculum inventory management): VCU's software platform for all course and curricular changes, including edits to existing or new courses, programs and concentrations, program or course learning outcomes, admission requirements and application deadlines, suspended admissions, and closures. Information from CIM feeds into the Bulletins through the CAT (catalog) software platform.

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 and Teach-out plan.)

Digital badge: A VCU-branded record and recognition of an individual's core knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies gained as a result of completing a defined set of requirements. A digital badge is a verifiable and shareable form of digital currency in the labor market. It is not an official form of academic credit. (See also Microcredentials.)

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 and Teach-out plan.)

Dual degree and certificate program: A structured, university-approved opportunity for students (usually graduate) to earn one degree and a certificate in less time and at reduced cost compared to standalone programs. The programs share a maximum of 20 percent of the credit hours required if the credentials were earned separately.

Dual degree program: A structured, university-approved opportunity for students (usually graduate) to earn two degrees in less time and at reduced cost compared to standalone programs. The programs share a maximum of 20 percent of the credit hours required if the credentials were earned separately.

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

Initiating unit: Academic unit advancing a proposal or request.

Joint degree program: A program that consists of a single degree and curriculum that is delivered through a partnership between two or more VCU academic units or between VCU and one or more regionally accredited domestic or international institutions. For joint programs involving multiple institutions, students receive a single diploma bearing the names, seals and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

Microcredential: An alternative credential (digital badge, license, certification, or certificate of completion or achievement) that represents a learner's knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies demonstrated through the completion of noncredit, extracurricular, co-curricular and/or credit-bearing coursework, examinations, applications or other activities. It is not an official form of academic credit, and does not require SCHEV approval as do certificate or degree programs. A microcredential may be stackable. Depending on the type, a microcredential can be issued and maintained by VCU or a third party. (See also Digital badge.)

Organizational change: An alteration in the structure of an academic unit (i.e., a unit that houses an academic program). Can include establishing a new department, changing the name of an academic unit/department, closing/terminating an academic unit, reorganizing a college/school, establishing an off-campus site or any other change at or above department level for units offering certificate or degree programs.

Permanent suspension of admission/entry: The first step in the process for the closure/discontinuance of an academic program.

Policy: Per the VCU Integrity and Compliance Office, a statement(s) that articulates requirements and expectations for behavior, actions and activities of the university community. May require or prohibit an action, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and/or mitigate risk.

Procedure: Per the VCU Integrity and Compliance Office, mandatory actions and processes necessary to comply with a policy, support compliance with applicable laws and regulations and mitigate risk. At VCU a policy generally includes required procedures for following it.

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

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: Required 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

Virginia Commonwealth University adheres to the educational degree program structure and content requirements outlined in Standard 9.1 of the SACSCOC [Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement](#).

> *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 a minimum of 15 weeks, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time such as a mini-term. 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/undergraduate certificate:** A program of study where all coursework is at the bachelor's 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 coursework 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. Coursework 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 coursework, 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 Agreements and Partnerships section of this handbook.

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

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs ([atarroyo@vcu.edu](mailto:atarroyo@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 (certificates and degrees) and efficiently guiding them through VCU's development and approval process outlined below. For specific information regarding the development or modification of online courses and programs, please see Chapter 3.

## 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 and market (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 or licensure requirements
- 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 a 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.

1. **Notification and preliminary discovery.** Initiating unit contacts Provost's Office using the program development and modification/organizational change request form to begin the process.

   For proposed program closures, the academic program closure request form must be completed as well.

2. **Pre-proposal development and review.** SCHEV liaison meets with the representative(s) from the initiating unit to provide guidance based on the specific request. For new degree program proposals, the initiating unit completes a pre-proposal form that makes academic and business cases for the request and a pre-proposal authorization form. Both forms are supplied by the SCHEV liaison after the meeting. New certificate program proposals require the pre-proposal authorization form only.

3. **Full proposal development and review.** With support from the Provost's Office, the initiating unit completes a full SCHEV proposal and VCU Substantive Change Checklist for the purpose of identifying SACSCOC implications. The SCHEV liaison requests a new program code.

4. **Institutional approval process.** After receiving approval at the appropriate levels within the school/college (see chapter 12), the final full proposal enters the university approval process.
   ○ University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee *or* University Graduate Council
   ○ University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies
   ○ University Council
   ○ President's Cabinet
   ○ Board of Visitors

5. **Proposal submission to SCHEV/SACSCOC.** Once internally approved, the proposal is submitted to SCHEV (and SACSCOC as needed) for notification or approval. The Provost's Office facilitates the necessary submissions at this stage. Though this is the culminating step in the approval process, VCU cannot assume approval. The final outcome is not guaranteed.
   ○ For new degree programs that require SCHEV Council approval, SCHEV requires a two-step process to include a program announcement, in advance of the degree proposal being submitted.

6. **Implementation.** If SCHEV approves the proposal, SCHEV staff will send a written approval to the provost. The Provost's Office 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 Bulletin 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. Please see Chapter 18 of this handbook.

## Program modification review and approval process
Academic units may also seek to modify an academic program. Examples include:

- Add a concentration
- Change a core curriculum requirement
- Change a modality or delivery format (for online program information, please see Chapter 3)
- Change a program name/title
- Merge programs or create spin-off programs
- Change degree or certificate program 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 and whether they require SCHEV action. Some modifications also may involve SACSCOC notification or approval.

## Queue
The current list of items in the Office of the Provost's SCHEV queue is located on the academic program status tracker web page, which is available to all faculty and staff.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to the academic program proposal specialist ([schevliaisons@vcu.edu](mailto:schevliaisons@vcu.edu)).

# Chapter 3 Online course and program development

***This chapter is under development.***

# Chapter 4 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.

If students are enrolled in a program when a decision is made to temporarily suspend admissions, the unit must continue offering courses required for the program to ensure timely completion for existing students.

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

The faculty of a college/school or department may wish to temporarily suspend admission or entry to a degree or certificate program for one or more reasons including but not limited to:

- Program-wide curricular updates of a significant nature
- Lack of qualified faculty
- Low or no enrollment in recent year(s)*
- Low productivity (i.e., retention and graduation rates)
- Financial exigency (a financial crisis that requires reduction or reallocation of expenditures and consequent reduction, reorganization or termination of university programs and activities that cannot be achieved through normal academic, administrative, budgetary and personnel processes)
- 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 addressed 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 Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 5 Permanent suspension of admission/entry and closure/discontinuance

Chapter 4 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:

- Low or no enrollment in recent year(s)*
- Lack of qualified faculty
- Faculty no longer support the program
- Program is outdated and can no longer meet employers' needs
- Low productivity (i.e., retention and graduation rates)
- Financial exigency (a financial crisis that requires reduction or reallocation of expenditures and consequent reduction, reorganization or termination of university programs and activities that cannot be achieved through normal academic, administrative, budgetary and personnel processes)
- 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 4, 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. Complete the *program development and modification request* form. 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.

d. 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. Teach-out plans may be completed through the Academic Program Closure Request Form and consist of the following:

- A Substantive Change Cover Sheet [PDF].
- Provide the closure date, defined by SACSCOC as the date when students are no longer admitted.
- An explanation of how affected parties – students, faculty, and staff – will be informed of the impending closure (This will include an explanation of how the department plans to contact stopped-out students.)
- An explanation of how all affected students will be helped to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption or additional costs
- An explanation of whether the students subject to the teach-out plan will incur additional charges or other expenses because of the teach-out and, if so, how the students will be notified
- Copies of signed teach-out agreements with other institutions, if applicable
- A description of how faculty and staff will be redeployed or helped to find new employment
  Note: Do not submit individually identifiable student information.

2. **Permanent suspension in CIM (curriculum inventory management) system.** The unit requests the permanent suspension in CIM.

3. **Institutional review and approval.** The program closure proposal advances through the institutional review and approval process in CIM.
   a. University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee _or_ University Graduate Council
   b. University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies (UCAAUP)
   c. University Council
   d. President's Cabinet
   e. Board of Visitors

4. **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.

5. **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.

Note about program responsibilities: Upon receipt of closure approval from SCHEV and SACSCOC, program director(s) must notify remaining students that the program has closed and entered teach-out. Additionally, the program director(s) must provide students with options for graduation, including but not limited to continuing the coursework required for the closed degree or transferring to a similar program at the university.

## 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 Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 6 Organizational changes

Some units that administer academic programs within the university may seek to make changes to their 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 the department level.

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. Generally, SCHEV considers organizational changes for units that house degree or certificate programs. However, there are particular nuances that require consultation with the Office of the Provost to ensure appropriate approvals are obtained. Some organizational changes also may require notification and/or approval from SACSCOC.

## Types of organizational changes
Organizational changes can be simple or complex.

- A simple change is a structural alteration (establishment, reorganization or closure/termination), proposed solely for the purpose of internal management, that would **not alter** the institution's mission or curricular offerings and would be executable within currently authorized funds.
- A complex change is a structural alteration (establishment, reorganization or closure/termination), not proposed solely for the purpose of internal management, that **may alter** the institution's mission or curricular offerings and/or may not be executable within currently authorized funds (e.g., establishing a new unit – college, school or department – or a "non-exempt" off-campus instructional site).

Some organizational changes also may require notification and/or approval from SACSCOC.

## Development and approval process
All academic units seeking an organizational change should follow this process.

1. **Notification:** Initiating unit contacts Provost's Office using the [program development and modification/organizational change request form](#) to begin the process.

2. **Proposal authorization.** SCHEV liaison meets with the representative(s) from the initiating unit to provide guidance based on the specific request. SCHEV liaison supplies a proposal authorization form to complete after the meeting. The authorization form must be completed and signed by the appropriate officials before proposal development begins.

3. **Proposal development and review.** With support from the Provost's Office, the initiating unit completes a full SCHEV proposal and [VCU Substantive Change Checklist](#) for the purpose of identifying SACSCOC implications.

4. **Institutional review and approval.** After receiving approval at the appropriate levels within the school/college (see chapter 12), the final proposal enters the university review and approval process:

a. University Council, Committee on Academic Affairs and University Policies
   b. University Council
   c. President's Cabinet
   d. Board of Visitors

5. **Proposal submission to SCHEV and SACSCOC.** Once internally approved, the proposal is submitted to SCHEV (and SACSCOC as needed) for notification or approval. The Office of the Provost facilitates the necessary submissions at this stage. Though this is the culminating step in the approval process, VCU cannot assume approval. The final outcome is not guaranteed.

6. **Implementation.** If SCHEV approves the proposal, SCHEV staff will send a written approval to the provost. The Provost's Office will send the written notification to the college/school dean and all relevant parties, which will include the date for program implementation. The program initiator will work with the Bulletin editor to provide content for the Bulletin.

   If the organizational change constitutes a substantive change as per SACSCOC policy, then program approval must be obtained by SACSCOC as well prior to implementation. Please see Chapter 18 of this handbook.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to the academic program proposal specialist (schevliaisons@vcu.edu).

# ACCELERATED and DUAL PROGRAMS

# Chapter 7 Accelerated bachelor's-to-master's degree programs

The Office of the Provost provides support and guidance for developing accelerated bachelor's-to-master's degree programs. An accelerated program is a structured, university-approved opportunity for academically qualified students to consecutively earn their bachelor's and master's degrees in less time and at reduced cost compared to pursuing each as a standalone degree program.

## SCHEV and SACSCOC

Each accelerated program must preserve the integrity and rigor of the standalone programs. The nature and focus of each bachelor's and master's degree program that make up the accelerated program must be consistent with the originally approved programs. Provided these factors remain true, no action from SCHEV and/or SACSCOC is required for accelerated programs. VCU's rigorous review, approval and implementation policies and protocols are designed to ensure compliance with all related SCHEV and SACSCOC requirements.

## Reasons to develop an accelerated program

Faculty develop accelerated programs for many reasons. Some of the most common reasons include:

- Need to champion more efficient (less time) and affordable (lower cost) higher education options
- Desire to attract academically talented undergraduate students to VCU with rigorous educational opportunities
- Goal of increasing master's pipelines and enrollments by retaining VCU undergraduates through graduate school
- Aspiration to increase the number of VCU master's-prepared individuals in the workforce

## Accelerated program development review and approval process

The accelerated program development review and approval process reflects a shared governance environment and a responsibility to comply with relevant internal and external policies. This process fosters transparency, accountability and equity for all stakeholders. All academic units seeking to create or modify an accelerated program must follow this process.

1. **Development.** Initiating unit contacts assistant vice for academic programs to receive a blank accelerated program template, a shared courses justification template and a workflow template. After completing the templates, the unit and AVP work together to resolve any curricular issues. The AVP may involve other academic affairs team members as needed during this process.
2. **Entry into CIM.** After the template and shared course justification are complete, the AVP forwards the documents to the Bulletin managing editor to build the form in the curriculum inventory management system (CIM) (https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/programadmin/). The Bulletin editor notifies the initiating unit when the proposed program is ready to advance into the CIM workflow.
3. **Institutional approval process.** The final accelerated proposal follows this workflow after local unit approval:
   a. University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UUCC)
   b. University Graduate Council (UGC)

Because both UUCC and UGC approval are needed, initiating units must plan for both committee reviews in their timeline. As with all programs and courses, the deadline for UUCC and UGC approval is December for inclusion in the next academic year's bulletin. UUCC approval must precede UGC

approval, so units should plan accordingly. Approved accelerated programs appear in accelerated opportunities tabs associated with the respective undergraduate degree programs (example [here](#)).

## Additional program specifics

Academic units must be aware of the following:

1.  Accelerated program proposals where one or both degrees do not meet the common core standard will be subject to additional reviews and requirements (i.e., to create a core or a plan to reach core) before the accelerated proposal can advance.
2.  Accelerated programs should be degree program to degree program. Concentration-level accelerated program proposals are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and approved under rare exception.
3.  Accelerated programs may share up to 12 credit hours identified from the graduate program. Undergraduate courses (100-400 level) are not eligible for sharing.
4.  A graduate course identified for sharing will most often satisfy an elective requirement in the undergraduate program. Exceptions will be subject to additional rigorous academic justification.
5.  Units will be encouraged to prescribe the shared coursework rather than allowing "select from" options.
6.  The bachelor's and master's degrees are awarded consecutively, not concurrently. Students may not be classified as undergraduate and graduate at the same time.
7.  Units must review their accelerated program curricula annually to ensure any changes to the standalone programs are reflected in the accelerated program. Any changes to the accelerated program must go through UUCC and UGC.
8.  Inter-departmental or inter-school/college collaborations require extra planning and communication.
9.  Accelerated programs can expect periodic university-level review for productivity (e.g., enrollments; completions). Programs with low or no productivity may be flagged for discussion and potential closure in an effort to maintain a relevant inventory.

## Operational specifics

A seamless, positive experience for accelerated students depends on VCU's entire process being followed. These steps are sequential. Failure to follow these steps can have negative, irreversible implications for billing, financial aid, scholarships and degree completion.

STEP ONE. Consultation between undergraduate student, adviser and graduate program director

> The process begins with conversations involving the student, adviser and graduate program director to determine the student's eligibility and to explain the process and expectations. Some graduate programs may have limited spots available for accelerated students in a given year, making a consultation at the earliest opportunity essential. Entry into an accelerated program is not guaranteed for all qualified students due to capacity limitations. Early conversations are strongly encouraged.

> Also at this consultation, these six steps should be discussed so all parties are clear on their responsibilities and the timeline.

STEP TWO. Submission of an Accelerated Program Declaration Form

> After the initial consultation and determination that the accelerated program is appropriate for the student, the student must submit the Accelerated Program Declaration Form. The form must be

approved by the graduate program director with copies to designated persons on the undergraduate side (e.g., department chair; adviser).

*At this stage, students **should not** submit an application to the graduate program. If a student submits an application to the graduate program, and if the program admits the student, significant negative billing implications can result.*

Note on effective bulletin: Effective bulletin changes apply only to changes in degree program, not when declaring an accelerated program. Accelerated students only have to change their effective bulletin if they are also changing their major to a program that went into effect under a later bulletin. Students who are entering an accelerated program within their same major will not have to update their effective bulletin, even if the accelerated program was created under a different bulletin.

STEP THREE. Completion of the remaining baccalaureate degree, including designated shared graduate courses

Upon processing of the Accelerated Program Declaration Form, VCU Records and Registration codes the undergraduate student as an accelerated student (ACCL) for tracking purposes. The student completes the remainder of the baccalaureate degree, including designated shared graduate courses that satisfy the undergraduate courses outlined in the appropriate VCU Bulletin program page. The student, adviser and graduate program director work together to ensure the plan of study remains accurate and current, as well as to monitor the student's progress and success.

Registration can take place in two ways.

1. Special Action Form and override. Academic unit submits an SAF to the Graduate School and overrides the student into the graduate course(s) upon approval.
2. Direct student registration. In order for the students to register without an override, the departments must work with course scheduling in Records and Registration to identify the courses that need to have the correct restrictions. Students with the ACCL pathway will then be able to register for specific courses.

Please note that the student is an accelerated *undergraduate* student until the baccalaureate degree is conferred. Tuition and fees are assessed at the VCU undergraduate rate, including for the shared graduate courses. The accelerated student is not a graduate student at this point. Admission to the graduate program is a separate step.

STEP FOUR. Application and admission to the graduate program

The accelerated student must follow the required steps for admission to graduate study outlined in the VCU Bulletin, including adhering to admissions deadlines. Accelerated students whose academic performance meets the minimum requirements set forth in the VCU Bulletin can expect to be accepted into the graduate program as a benefit to having participated and succeeded in an approved accelerated program.

It is important to emphasize that this step is separate and distinct from Step Two. Since the shared graduate courses count toward the undergraduate program requirements, the student may choose not to pursue the master's degree, and still leave VCU with the baccalaureate degree in-hand.

*Programs should not admit students into the graduate program until step five. Students admitted into the graduate program prematurely will face significant negative billing implications.*

STEP FIVE. Awarding of the baccalaureate degree

The accelerated student must apply to graduate from their undergraduate program following the process outlined in the VCU Bulletin. The awarding of the baccalaureate degree is a distinct step that students must complete before moving into the graduate program. The student is officially admitted to the graduate program and the student record and classification is updated from the undergraduate to the graduate program. This update is necessary for tuition and fee assessment and the awarding/disbursing of the appropriate financial aid amounts. No student may be enrolled in an undergraduate and graduate program at the same time.

STEP SIX. Completion of the remaining master's degree requirements

After completion of the prior steps, the accelerated student finishes the remaining master's degree requirements leading to the awarding of the master's degree. Tuition and fees are assessed at the graduate tuition rate.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 8 Dual and joint academic programs

The Office of the Provost provides support and guidance for developing dual and joint academic programs. The focus of this chapter is dual academic programs as joint degrees are rare. Special consultations regarding joint degrees are available upon request.

A *dual degree program* is a structured, university-approved opportunity for students to earn two degrees in less time and at reduced cost compared to standalone programs. A *dual degree and certificate program* offers students a similar opportunity applied to one degree and one certificate program. In most cases, these programs apply to graduate students only.

A *joint degree program* consists of a single degree and curriculum that is delivered through a partnership between two or more VCU academic units or between VCU and one or more regionally accredited domestic or international institutions. For joint programs involving multiple institutions, students receive a single diploma bearing the names, seals and signatures of each of the participating institutions.

## SCHEV and SACSCOC
Each dual academic program must preserve the integrity and rigor of the standalone programs. The nature and focus of each program must be consistent with what was originally approved. Provided these factors remain true, no action from SCHEV and/or SACSCOC is required for VCU dual programs. VCU's rigorous review, approval and implementation policies are designed to ensure compliance with all related SCHEV and SACSCOC standards and policies.

Dual academic programs that involve partnerships with other institutions are subject to additional reporting responsibilities and procedures, including potential SCHEV and/or SACSCOC notifications, reviews and/or approvals. The specifics of these partnerships are codified in detailed agreements that require several levels of approval culminating in the signature of the provost (see Agreements and Partnerships section of this handbook). Academic affairs staff provide support and direction to ensure compliance with applicable internal and external policies.

## Reasons to develop a dual academic program
Faculty develop dual academic programs for many reasons. Some of the most common reasons include:

- Need to champion more efficient (less time) and affordable (lower cost) higher education options
- Desire to attract academically talented students to VCU with opportunities to earn multiple credentials
- Goal of increasing master's pipelines and enrollments by combining academic program options
- Aspiration to increase the number of highly prepared individuals in the workforce

## Dual academic program development review and approval process
The dual degree program and dual degree and certificate program development review and approval process reflects a shared governance environment and a responsibility to comply with relevant internal and external policies. This process fosters transparency, accountability and equity for all stakeholders. All academic units seeking to create or modify a dual degree program must follow this process.

1. **Development.** Initiating unit contacts assistant vice provost for academic programs to receive all required templates. After completing the templates, the unit and AVP work together to resolve any curricular issues. The AVP may involve other academic affairs team members as needed

during this process. Additional instructions and steps will be provided at this stage for proposals involving non-VCU programs.

2. **Entry into CIM.** After the template and shared course justification are complete, the AVP forwards the documents to the Bulletin managing editor to build the form in CIM (https://next.bulletin.vcu.edu/programadmin/). The managing editor notifies the initiating unit when the proposed program is ready to advance into the CIM workflow.

3. **Institutional approval process.** The final proposal must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate university curriculum committee in addition to school/college level reviews and approvals. As with all programs and courses, the deadline for university curriculum committee approval is December for inclusion in the next academic year's bulletin.

Approved graduate dual degrees and dual degree and certificate programs between VCU programs appear in a special bulletin section. Approved programs (graduate and undergraduate) between VCU and other institutions appear in the bulletin with the corresponding VCU program.

## Additional program specifics

Academic units must be aware of the following:

1. Programs must be in the VCU curriculum inventory management (CIM) system, not in CAT (catalog) or unit websites. No programs should be offered until they are in CIM and fully approved by the appropriate university-level curriculum committee.
2. Any VCU academic program that will be used in a dual academic program must meet the common core standard or have a plan to reach core before the proposal can advance to the university curriculum committee. Academic affairs provides support to develop a common core when necessary.
3. Dual degree programs should be degree program to degree program. Dual degree program proposals that specify a concentration are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
4. Dual degree and dual degree and certificate programs may share a maximum of 20 percent of the combined credit hours required to earn both degrees.
5. A course identified for sharing by one program will most often satisfy an elective requirement in the partner program. Exceptions will be subject to additional rigorous academic justification.
6. Credentials may be awarded concurrently and/or consecutively, depending on how the program is designed.
7. Units must review their program curricula on a regular basis to ensure any changes to the standalone programs are reflected. Any changes to the program must go through the appropriate university curriculum committee.
8. Inter-departmental or inter-school/college collaborations require extra planning and communication. Moreover, partnerships with other institutions will be subject to a formal provost-signed agreement prepared and facilitated by academic affairs staff.
9. Dual degree and dual degree and certificate programs can expect periodic university-level review for productivity (e.g., enrollments; completions). Programs with low or no productivity may be flagged for discussion and potential closure in an effort to maintain a relevant inventory.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# MICRO-CREDENTIALS

# Chapter 9 Microcredentials

A microcredential is a representation of a learner's knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies demonstrated through the completion of noncredit, extracurricular, co-curricular and/or credit-bearing coursework, examinations, applications or other activities. Depending on the type, a microcredential can be issued and maintained by VCU or a third party.

Examples of VCU-issued microcredentials include digital badges, certificates of completion/achievement, awards and some types of certifications. Some VCU microcredentials may be stacked to form pathways. Unlike certificates and degree programs, these microcredentials do not require SCHEV or SACSCOC approval and they are not an official form of academic credit.

Examples of third-party microcredentials include licensures and certifications. A license or certification is a record of having met the requirements for a specific professional credential needed for employment or advancement in an occupation. Licensure or certification is often achieved by examination or application after graduation. Federal regulations require VCU to make certain disclosures to students regarding licensure and certification. Please see Chapter 10 for more information.

## Guiding principles
Guiding principles for microcredentials at VCU include:

- Students and professionals are increasingly seeking flexibility and ownership over their learning pathways and credentials to collect and share them at-will and across platforms
- VCU has the ability to respond and to deliver innovative solutions for student, employer and community needs
- Administrative units support university innovations with infrastructure for development and maintenance, and with guardrails for consistency and compliance
- Faculty assumes primary responsibility and oversight for the curriculum, including what is done with it
- Best practices regarding all forms of microcredentials are evolving
- VCU must remain nimble and flexible in its practices to ensure responsiveness to the evolving needs of students and employers

## Digital badges
As noted, digital badges are a particular type of microcredential. A digital badge is a VCU-branded graphic representation, record and recognition of an individual's core knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies gained as a result of completing a defined set of requirements. It is a verifiable and shareable form of digital currency in the labor market. A digital badge may be used by students in email signatures, e-portfolios, digital resumes and social media platforms. Each image contains verified metadata that describes the earner's qualifications and the process required to earn the badge.

VCU's digital badge collection is located at this website. Most digital badges at VCU are non-credit. If a digital badge requires registration for credit-bearing coursework as part of the completion requirements, it is important to emphasize that the digital badge is not an official form of academic credit.

Units may develop digital badges for many reasons. Some of the most common reasons include:

- Desire to respond quickly 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
- 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

**CONTACT**

For questions regarding any form of microcredential that may require registration for credit-bearing course(s), please contact Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

Questions regarding exclusively non-credit microcredentials may be directed to VCU Continuing and Professional Education (badging@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 10 Professional licensure disclosures

Federal regulations ([34 CFR 668.43](#)) require programs leading to professional licensure or certification to make certain disclosures to prospective and current students.

Unlike some other microcredentials (see Chapter 9), VCU does not issue or maintain the licenses and certifications discussed in this chapter. These forms of microcredentials are issued by external bodies, often by application and/or examination. This chapter discusses federal reporting obligations VCU has with respect to these licenses and certifications.

All programs, regardless of modality (in-person, online), are required to provide general (public) and direct (individual) disclosures to students in programs that lead to professional licensure or certification. The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements has aligned its licensure disclosure requirements with federal regulations described in this chapter.

Achieving and maintaining compliance with the applicable federal regulations is a shared institutional responsibility that begins with due diligence and accurate, timely reporting at the program level. Due to the institutional implications for non-compliance (e.g., eligibility to participate in Title IV federal financial aid), cooperation and coordination universitywide is essential.

This chapter provides an overview of requirements. A detailed implementation guide is available on the Office of the Provost professional licensure disclosures [page](#).

## Specifics for general and direct disclosures

This federal regulation applies to educational programs that are:

1. Designed to meet educational requirements for a specific professional license or certification that is <u>required</u> for employment in an occupation, *or*
2. Advertised as meeting such requirements

If a license or certification exists, but the program is not designed or advertised as meeting those requirements then the program should make a statement to that effect.

**General (public) disclosures** should be easy to access and are posted publicly on the Office of the Provost [professional licensure disclosure page](#). For each U.S. state and territory, the program has to determine if the program's curriculum:

1. <u>Does</u> meet educational requirements for licensure or certification
2. <u>Does not</u> meet educational requirements for licensure or certification
3. <u>Has not made a determination</u> about whether or not the program meets educational requirements for licensure or certification

Units with applicable programs are responsible for ensuring their program information is available and current. Updates and discrepancies should be communicated to the staff contacts listed at the end of this chapter.

**Direct (individual) disclosures** are not posted publicly, but are made directly in writing to prospective and current students if the program:

1. <u>Does not</u> meet educational requirements for licensure or certification in the state or territory where the student is physically located
2. <u>Has not made a determination</u> about whether or not the program meets educational requirements for licensure or certification in the state or territory where the student is physically located

Units must make a good faith effort to determine whether a program does or does not meet the requirements for each U.S. state and territory, and maintain documentation of that effort. "Has not made a determination" should be used when a determination cannot be made after appropriate due diligence.

Only University Counsel-approved templates located in the implementation guide should be used to report disclosures.

Email is an acceptable method of direct notification to students, and may be sent to individuals or to groups of students by state or territory. Programs should retain records of direct disclosures in a readily accessible file system in case of audit following the appropriate records management protocols. Please contact the Office of the Provost for additional information.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions jointly to Rachel Gable, Ed.D., director of institutional effectiveness (rgable@vcu.edu) and Yeimarie Lopez, compliance administrator for VCU Online (lopezy@vcu.edu).

# BULLETIN

# Chapter 11 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.

## Effective Bulletin

The Bulletin for the academic year a student enters or re-enters a degree program identifies the curriculum degree requirements for that student and serves as their effective Bulletin. Students in continuous enrollment may fulfill the curriculum degree requirements of the Bulletin for the year they matriculated at 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 (major, concentration, minor) 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. Changes to effective Bulletin should be considered carefully as they may delay time to graduation due to different degree requirements.

Because matriculation into the university sets an effective Bulletin, students who have left VCU or are no longer subject to continuous enrollment, must reapply to the university to resume degree-seeking activities. As such, 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.) It is important to emphasize that exercising this option should be the rare exception, not the rule, and have a strong and clear justification.

## 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. This schedule serves to present program options to prospective students in a timely manner so that they can make informed decisions about any admissions offers. Currently enrolled students can glean course information to guide them prior to registering for classes.

**CAT** (catalog) activity involves only noncurricular information, such as overview text for schools, departments and programs, administration changes and contact information. Each page has a page author who is determined by the unit and provisioned in the system to 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. This

schedule allows for an early spring launch of the website that can inform students, both prospective and enrolled, about programs and courses.

**CIM** (curriculum inventory management) (see also chapter 12 for in-depth information) activity covers all course and curricular changes, including edits to existing or new courses, programs and concentrations, program or course learning outcomes, admission requirements and application deadlines, 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. This schedule allows for an early spring launch of the website that can inform students, both prospective and enrolled, about programs and courses.

**Both CAT and CIM activity follow a calendar year (January to December) schedule.** The deadline for approvals for inclusion in the Bulletin launch for the subsequent academic year 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 early spring launch of the Bulletins website – before registration begins – ensures that students can see the most current descriptions of courses they may wish to register for and intend to take in the fall.

The only updates considered between the spring launch and final archiving of the Bulletin are for a high-level administrative change, such as a new dean, or an egregious error or to add new programs that were pending SCHEV and SACSCOC approval 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 12 Curriculum Inventory Management (CIM) system

VCU uses CourseLeaf's curriculum inventory management (CIM) system to manage several processes:

- 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
Workflow is the process that outlines the sequence of approvals for the proposal. This section provides an overview of the CIM workflow for courses and programs.

### For courses
The workflow for courses outlines the sequence of steps needed for any course proposal to be approved. The sequence varies based on the proposed action and the course's organizational affiliation (department, school/college) as each school or college has its own unique governing structure. 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.

**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 (i.e., user ID).

## 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
- GenEd Curriculum Committee Chair (if course is to be approved for general education)
- REAL Curriculum Committee Chair (if course is to be approved for REAL)
- Director of Assessment
- 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 committe*e
- 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*


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, a portion of the form 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 initiating 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 UGC 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.

**Technical 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 [undergraduate (UUCC) or graduate (UGC)] 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 UGC).

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: T**he 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
- Director of Program Review *FYI*
- 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 committe*e
- 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*


**Technical 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 UGC) 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, as well as a SACSCOC approval letter, if applicable. These new program and affiliated course proposals should be submitted at the same time.

**CONTACT**

Please send questions to Teri Dunnivant, Bulletin managing editor (bulletin@vcu.edu).

# AGREEMENTS and PARTNERSHIPS

# Chapter 13 Agreements with other domestic entities

Academic units at VCU form [agreements](#) and partnerships to leverage resources and expand educational opportunity for students, among other reasons. This chapter covers certain types of agreements (see examples below, not exhaustive) with other domestic entities that require academic affairs routing and the provost's signature.

The Office of the Provost is available to provide a consultation regarding agreements that do not appear on this list when the appropriate routing process is unclear.

## Types of agreements

Domestic agreements can include but are not limited to the following.

- **MOU:** A non-binding "handshake" agreement of a ceremonial nature between VCU and a partner institution. Agreement terms range from one to three years, renewable. (Development timetable: ~one month)

- **Clinical affiliation agreement:** Agreement that facilitates student clinical placements. Clinical affiliation agreements can be executed on VCU's approved template or on a non-standard template that goes through additional reviews and approvals. Agreement terms range from one semester to five years, renewable. (Development timetable: ~one month, or longer for non-standard templates)

- **Dual degree program:** Agreement that allows students to pursue study in a VCU academic program and an academic program at another institution, and receive two separate program completion credentials. Agreement terms are for three years, renewable. (Development timetable: ~18 months to three years) (Please also see Chapter 8.)

- **Dual enrollment:** Agreement between VCU and a high school or school district authorizing the delivery of VCU courses at the high school for which students receive high school and college credit. Agreement terms are for one academic year. (Development timetable: ~18 months to two years)

- [**Sale of goods and services**](#)**:** Agreement to engage in revenue-generating activities. Agreement terms vary. (Development timetable: varies)

- **Community college transfer and articulation:** Please see Chapter 15.

- **Other:** Agreements beyond the examples listed above are possible. Academic units should consult with the Office of the Provost on agreements not contained in this list and when the appropriate review and approval process is unknown.

## Process for executing agreements

The specific process for executing agreements varies according to the agreement type. In general, agreements that are routed from academic units through academic affairs include these steps:

1. **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.

Agreements that should be routed through academic affairs proceed to step two. Other agreements will be routed to the appropriate university unit(s).

2. **Development, reviews and finalization.** The next step is to develop the agreement and to conduct all required reviews leading to a final agreement. The duration of this step can vary from one month to multiple years. Unless otherwise specified during the discovery meeting, academic affairs liaises to complete the required review. A review may include but not be limited to any of the following:
   - Legal (i.e., University Counsel and the partner legal unit)
   - SCHEV and SACSCOC implications
   - Enrollment and financial aid implications
   - Curriculum development, review and approval
   - Budget implications

3. **Signatures obtained and implementation.** After the agreement language is finalized, academic affairs coordinates the signature process with the support of the VCU academic units. Copies are provided and an archive is maintained.

   No VCU employee should sign an agreement without a written memo granting them authority to do so. Email or verbal permission is insufficient. Per the VCU delegation of signatory authority policy: *Unless specifically authorized by this policy or a properly written delegation of signatory authority, no VCU employee may enter into an agreement that purports to bind the university. Any agreement executed with terms that exceed the authority of the individual signing or that of the university is void according to Virginia law and shall not bind the university. In such cases, the employee exceeding their authority, whether also signing or not, may be personally liable for the agreement's contents and obligations.*

   No activity associated with an agreement should be promised or begin until this process is complete. Failure to comply with this requirement places the university at risk and can have significant negative implications.

## Renewal and termination

For agreements that contain renewal terms, the renewal process should begin at least three to six months before expiration. For agreements routed through academic affairs, units should contact academic affairs to initiate the renewal process accordingly.

Agreements to be terminated must follow the termination process outlined in the agreement. Agreements that are terminated or not renewed should be handled according to the appropriate records management policy.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 14 International agreements

The Global Education Office is VCU's liaison for all international academic agreements. GEO is available to advise the initiating unit, including supplying examples of previously approved agreements for reference.

## 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 of a ceremonial nature between VCU and a partner institution. (Development timetable: ~one month)

- **Student exchange agreement:** Agreement for reciprocal student exchange. (Development timetable: ~one month)

- **Undergraduate enrollment agreement:** Agreement that expresses the current VCU process for accepting credits in transfer toward a specific VCU academic program. (Development timetable: ~one month)

- **Master's enrollment agreement:** Agreement to facilitate admission for international students to VCU master's programs. (Development timetable: ~two-to-three months)

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

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

- **Short-term study abroad agreement:** Agreement that details activities associated with a VCU Study Abroad Program at a particular site. (Development timetable: ~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. (Development timetable: ~one-to-two years)

- **Other/customized agreements:** GEO works in collaboration with initiating unit and relevant stakeholders to create customized agreement. (Development timetable: varies)

## Approval process for executing agreements

GEO follows a 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. **Request initiated.** VCU initiating unit completes the International Collaboration Request Form, including obtaining required signatures.

2. **Development, reviews and finalization.** GEO reviews form and facilitates discussions between relevant VCU units and partner universities for language/term negotiations. Academic affairs completes a review and liaises with University Counsel for a legal review.

3. **Signatures obtained and implementation.** GEO coordinates with academic affairs for the finalization of an appropriate agreement with final signatures. GEO distributes and retains electronic/hard copies of fully signed agreement as appropriate.

   No VCU employee should sign an agreement without a written memo granting them authority to do so. Email or verbal permission is insufficient. Per the VCU delegation of signatory authority policy: *Unless specifically authorized by this policy or a properly written delegation of signatory authority, no VCU employee may enter into an agreement that purports to bind the university. Any agreement executed with terms that exceed the authority of the individual signing or that of the university is void according to Virginia law and shall not bind the university. In such cases, the employee exceeding their authority, whether also signing or not, may be personally liable for the agreement's contents and obligations.*

   No activity associated with an agreement should be promised or begin until this process is complete. Failure to comply with this requirement places the university at risk and can have significant negative implications.

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

## Renewal and termination
For agreements that contain renewal terms, the renewal process should begin at least three to six months before expiration. For agreements routed through academic affairs, units should contact academic affairs to initiate the renewal process accordingly.

Agreements to be terminated must follow the termination process outlined in the agreement. Agreements that are terminated or not renewed should be handled according to the appropriate records management policy.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Jill Blondin, Ph.D., executive director, Global Education Office (jblondin@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 15 Community college transfer and articulation agreements

The Transfer Center is VCU's liaison for all agreements with community colleges. The Transfer Center will ensure that VCU's transfer agreements comply with SCHEV's "Public Higher Education Policy Guidelines for the Development of Transfer Agreements," adopted by Council on Oct. 27, 2020.

## Types of agreements

VCU has many transfer agreements with other institutions, particularly Virginia community colleges. These agreements are detailed on the admission agreements section of the [Transfer Center website](#).

- **Guaranteed admission agreements.** These agreements stipulate the requirements for guaranteed admission to VCU through the completion of an associate degree.

- **Guaranteed transfer partnership agreements.** These agreements facilitate the seamless transfer of credits from the community college to bachelor's degree programs at VCU and the development of four-year transfer maps. (Details on website)

- **Articulation and other MOU agreements.** These agreements include reverse transfer, co-enrollment and the VCU Honors College.

## Approvals process for executing transfer 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 president 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 facilitate the approval process. The approval process includes reviews by the academic department, dean's office, 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](#).

## 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.*

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, Ph.D., associate vice president for transfer initiatives and programs ([ssykes@vcu.edu](mailto:ssykes@vcu.edu)).

# QUALITY ENHANCEMENT and CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

# Chapter 16 Student learning outcomes assessment

Student learning outcomes 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 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.

## 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.

Finally, the Office of the Provost and accredited degree programs use assessment findings and action plans to demonstrate to external stakeholders[1] 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 and policy

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. Please see the VCU policy on assessing student learning outcomes in degree and certificate programs for more information

## Assessment Management System tutorials

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

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Veronica Powell Shuford, Ph.D., director of program development and innovation (vpshufor@vcu.edu ).

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[1] External stakeholders include the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia and degree program accreditors in health and human services, education, engineering, business and others.

# Chapter 17 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.

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. This chapter provides an overview of VCU's approach. Please see the VCU Academic Program Review Handbook for more details.

## 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.

Exceptions to the above approach may be necessary. Under certain circumstances, an academic program review may include all programs in a 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**



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. 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 institutional accreditation. Still, academic program review is a distinct activity with its own purpose and goals.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).

# COMPLIANCE and QUALITY ASSURANCE

# Chapter 18 Institutional accreditation

VCU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) 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
- 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, Ph.D., SACSCOC accreditation liaison and senior vice provost for academic affairs ([nobletriplett@vcu.edu](mailto: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 19 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 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 support 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.[2] 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 senior vice president for health sciences.

*Two-to-three weeks prior to site visit*

> Self-study director, program director, department chair and dean meet with the provost and/or senior vice president for health sciences 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 senior vice president for health sciences (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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[2] 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 senior vice president for health sciences (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 senior vice president for health sciences (for health sciences programs only) to review accreditation decision.

## Relationship 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, Ph.D., senior vice provost for academic affairs (nobletriplett@vcu.edu).

# Chapter 20 Academic affairs policies and academic regulations

This chapter covers academic affairs policies located in the VCU policy library and academic regulations located in the VCU Bulletin.

## Academic affairs policies

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 local academic unit level align with universitywide academic affairs policies and procedures. When crafting local policies and procedures, the VCU policy library should be consulted first to ensure the local aligns with the university. When in conflict, university policies 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 and/or adopting consistent language.

## 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 key stakeholders during the policy development or revision process, prior to the formal approval process. 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 policies to know

VCU stakeholders should be familiar with all universitywide policies. Please consult the responsible office listed in each policy for its official interpretation.

## Academic regulations

Academic regulations are located in the VCU Bulletin. Regulations are policies or rules that address registration, enrollment, courses, grades and other areas pertaining to students in academic programs. 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, authors of unit-level policies and/or guidelines, including program handbooks, should ensure their documents align with those found in the current VCU Bulletin. Academic affairs is available for consultations with local policy authors to ensure alignment.

The Academic Regulations Committee is a standing committee in the Office of the Provost that 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. Any member of the VCU community may suggest a new academic regulation to be brought forward for consideration by a member of ARC. It is important to

note that ARC is a recommending body, and that the provost makes the final determination whether to adopt a recommendation as a regulation.

Appeals

Appeals of regulations are handled differently for undergraduate and graduate students.

1) Undergraduate students. The Academic Regulations and Appeals Committee considers petitions from undergraduate students appealing any applicable regulation in the academic regulations section of the Bulletin. The process for appealing a regulation through ARAC is located here.
2) Graduate students. Appeals for graduate and professional students are submitted via special action forms and reviewed by the Graduate School. The process is located here.

**CONTACT**

Please direct questions to Andrew Arroyo, Ed.D., assistant vice provost for academic programs (atarroyo@vcu.edu).