

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

September 4, 2025

Members present: Kaplan, G. (Graduate Council Chair); Akerman, J., Aydeniz, M., Bettaieb, A., Boles, E., Brown, N., Castillo-Rodriguez, M., Cho, M., Crouch, C., Dickerson, A., Donovan, P., Down, I., Fathy, A., Finotti, L., Fussell-Ware, D., Heck, H., Hembree, D., Higgins, P., Lucio, R., Mahero, M., Mills, J., Montgomery, K., Ng, Z., Ohnesorg, S., Okafor, C., Ostrowski, J., Ownley, B., Pannu, H. (Graduate Student Senate President), Patrick, J., Penney, J., Reynolds, T., Rocconi, L. (Graduate Council Chair Elect); Schaur, G., Shum, K., Thompson, P., Wang, T., Whiteside, E., Whitlock, B., Xu, S.

Ex-Officio members present: Angelle, P., Ambroziak, K., Brothers, E., Bruner, M., Cathey, A., Childers, C., Collins, C., Gould, E., Lane, I., Laursen, S. (Graduate Council Past Chair), Lukosi, E., McConville, B., Scheb, J., Stier, J., Van Puymbroeck, M., Vllasi, E.

Other attendees present: Guest speaker: Ashley Browning, SACSCOC; Graduate School: Cheatham, M., Favier, G., Cox, C. (Graduate Council Liaison); Digital Learning: Steele, J.

College/Unit attendees: College of Arts and Sciences: Mitchell, L., Cox, C.; College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences: Slaton, L.

1. **Call to Order and Welcome** (Greg Kaplan)

The Graduate Council Zoom meeting was called to order by Graduate Council Chair, Greg Kaplan on Thursday, September 4, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.

Welcomed members to the first Graduate Council meeting of the year.

Emphasized the Graduate Catalog is a contractual document with students, and it must remain clear, accurate, and truthful. Curriculum proposals are central to the Graduate Council's responsibilities.

2. **Minutes of the Preceding Meeting**

Kaplan reported the April 24, 2025, Graduate Council Minutes were approved electronically on April 30, 2025.

3. **Welcome by the Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School** (Marieke Van Puymbroeck)

Welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed eagerness to work with the Council this year. Acknowledged as the new dean, will have a learning curve this year.

Expressed gratitude to Amy Cathey for her leadership while serving as the interim dean.

Noted there is a new internal process for new program proposals before external review, emphasizing accuracy and feasibility for approval.

4. **Guest Speaker:** Ashley Browning, Assistant Director of Accreditation / SACSCOC

Ashley was invited to our first meeting to share and explain information concerning SACSCOC requirements.

- Presented information on substantive change and SACSCOC requirements.
- Defined substantive change as major modifications to programs or delivery methods.
- Highlighted that failure to report changes risks institutional accreditation.
- Outlined processes for:
 - New programs (require notifications or full prospectus if ≥50% new content).
 - Program closures (must be pre-approved; closure date = last admission date).
 - Off-campus instructional sites (≥50% delivery requires approval; currently only Tullahoma Space Institute and Nashville are approved).
 - New delivery methods (≥50% online or other modalities require notification).
- Urged faculty to communicate early with her office.
- Communicated she attends curriculum meetings to help track compliance.
- Mentioned slides presented at meeting will be included in the Council Minutes. See attachment 1.

Kaplan: thanked Ashley for sharing the process and the important information and reinforced Ashley's point that the catalog must mirror actual curriculum changes.

5. Committee Reports:

Academic Policy Committee – no meeting, no report.

Appeals Committee (Louis Rocconi, Chair) – No appeals to report for this meeting.

Curriculum Committee – no meeting, no report.

Graduate Student Research Awards – (Marieke Van Puymbroeck, Chair)

The fall deadline to submit GSRA applications is October 10, 2025.

6. Administrative Reports and Announcements:

Dean's Update (Marieke Van Puymbroeck)

- I have no update for today's meeting.

Graduate Student Senate (Harkeet "Kittu" Pannu, GSS President)

- We had our first meeting on August 26. We introduced all the senators.
- We approved 12 executive board members.
- We discussed our Code of Conduct.
- We talked about our major initiatives for this year:
 - Having a Graduate Student Bill of Rights.
 - Making athletic events more accessible for graduate and professional students.
- Our next Senate meeting is September 23, where we will focus on international student issues.

Graduate Council Chair (Greg Kaplan)

- Kaplan had no report, but reminded the members that when the Council meeting is adjourned, the members will go to the breakout rooms to discuss each committee's function and for APC and Curriculum, a chair needs to be selected.

The Council meeting adjourned at 3:40 and the members went to their respective breakout rooms.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Cox
Graduate Council Liaison

Attachment 1

Ashley Browning, Assistant Director of Accreditation (SACSCOC)
Slides from presentation



SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy

- The Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) substantive change policy ensures that all aspects of an institution continue to meet Standards.
- Per federal regulation, “If the agency [SACSCOC] accredits institutions, it must maintain adequate substantive change policies that ensure that any substantive change..., after the agency has accredited ... the institution does not adversely affect the capacity of the institution to continue to meet the agency's standards.”

What is a Substantive Change?

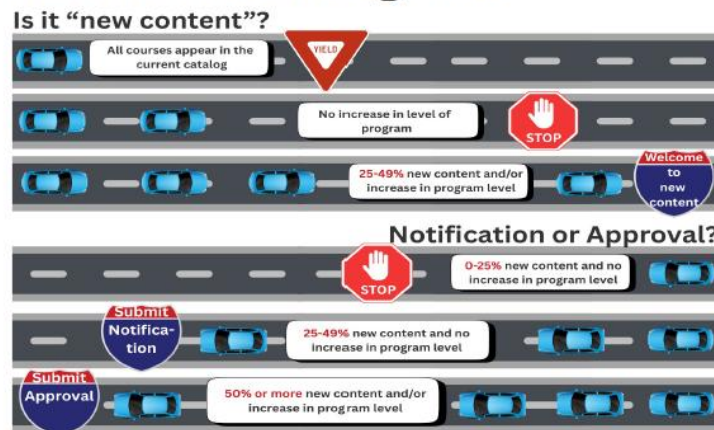


- **New programs, program closures, new locations**, and other institutional changes are subject to **notification and/or approval** as defined in Substantive Change Policy and Procedures.
- Administrators, faculty, and staff, are obliged to assist with recognizing and reporting such substantive changes.
- **Failure to report these and other planned substantive changes can result in loss of institutional accreditation.**

New Programs

- **25 - 49% “new” program content” = notification**
 - We can submit notification up to the day before start of program.
- **50% or more “new content” = approval**
 - We are required to submit and receive approval of an involved prospectus prior to starting a program.
 - For a fall 2026 start, the prospectus must be submitted by January 2026. **A first draft of the prospectus should be submitted to IE by October 2025 to ensure the submission deadline is met.**

Procedure for New Programs



Program Closure

- **SACSCOC considers the date we stop admitting students as the closure date.**
- Program closures (including certificates) must be approved by SACSCOC prior to the closure date.
- A teach-out plan is required, including communication plans to faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders.
- Programs may be reopened within 5 years via notification, if needed.

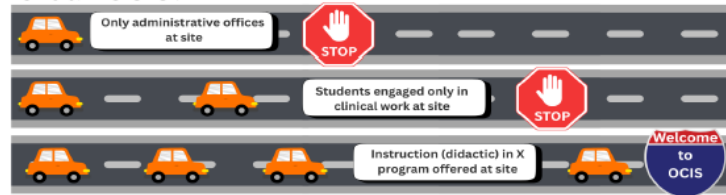
New Location



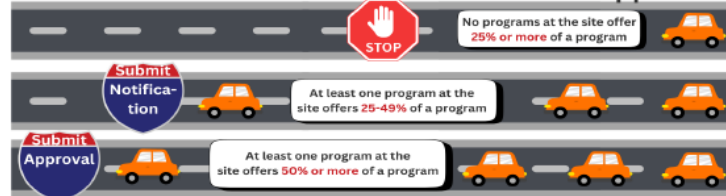
- **50% or more** of a program (including certificates) offered at a new location = approval of the location by SACSCOC.
 - We are required to submit and receive approval of an involved prospectus before opening a new Off-Campus Instructional Site (OCIS).
 - For a fall 2026 start, the prospectus must be submitted by January 2026. **A first draft of the prospectus should be submitted to IE by October 2025 to ensure the submission deadline is met.**
- There are only two approved OCISs for full programs: Tullahoma (UTSI) and Nashville (College of Social Work).

Procedure for New Locations

Is it an OCIS?



Notification or Approval?



New Method of Delivery

- If **50% of a program** (including certificates) will be taught via a new method of delivery (e.g., adding online delivery to a program taught in-person; adding in-person delivery to a program taught only online), a notification must be submitted to SACSCOC prior to implementation.
- Since 1998, the institution has been authorized by SACSCOC to offer programs via distance education.

Getting Started



- Utilize the [checklist](#) to determine the type of action needed with SACSCOC. IE will work with the unit to submit proper correspondence.
- Some changes require both SACSCOC and THEC notification or approval. Usually, **there is no need to wait for THEC approval** to begin SACSCOC procedures.
 - When SACSCOC reviews the submission, they will reach out to confirm THEC approval, if needed.
- Communicate with IE early and often.

Closing the Loop

- After initial submission, SACSCOC may require additional information for review. IE corresponds with units to gather additional information.
- Upon receipt of a SACSCOC Action Letter, IE will notify the unit and the Graduate School.
 - A copy of the Action Letter is included for unit records.

Thank You!

Questions?

ashleyb@tennessee.edu

