

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Institutional Accreditation – Roles and Responsibilities

Functional Lead: Provost

Division: Academic Support Division

Responsible Office: Institutional Accreditation Liaison

Ref: (a) 10 USC 8592: Degree granting authority for Marine Corps University

(b)

(c) Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation Fourth Edition Published 2024(d) Integrity and Institutional Obligations to SACSCOC

(e) SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy

1. Purpose. The purpose of this section is to provide Marine Corps University (MCU) personnel with an overview of the requirements for maintaining institutional accreditation and define roles and responsibilities in carrying out those requirements.

2. Background. Per reference (a), the President, MCU is authorized by the United States Congress to confer appropriate degrees upon graduates who meet degree requirements. A degree may not be conferred unless:

(1) the Secretary of Education has recommended approval of the degree in accordance with the Federal Policy Governing Granting of Academic Degrees by Federal Agencies; and

(2) MCU is accredited by the appropriate civilian academic accrediting agency or organization to award the degree, as determined by the Secretary of Education.

The Secretary of Education has recommended approval of three master's degrees – a Master of Military Studies for MCU's intermediate level professional military education (PME) program at resident Command and Staff College (CSC), a Master of Operational Studies for the advanced intermediate School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW), and a Master of Strategic Studies at its senior level PME program, Marine Corps War College (MCWAR).

Accreditation status. MCU is a member of, and accredited by, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which granted MCU initial accreditation in 1999, and re-affirmed it in 2005 and 2015.

Accreditation certifies that MCU as an institution, and the educational value of its degrees, meets the established and recognized standards for academic institutions of higher learning contained in the Principles of Accreditation [reference (b)] and applicable SACSCOC policies, per the guidance contained in reference (c).

Reaffirmation process. Reaffirmation review consists of a comprehensive analysis of MCU as an institution and is therefore not limited to merely the degree granting and credit-bearing programs. Every aspect of the University's functions – its authorities, organization, personnel, facilities,

services, fiscal status, faculty credentials, policies, assessments, etc. come under review. In some ways, it is broadly analogous to a complete military Inspector General command inspection.

The process consists of 1) MCU submission of a Compliance Certification Report; 2) an off-site review and report by a SACSCOC Committee of evaluators that assesses compliance with the Principles of Accreditation; 3) MCU submission of a Focused Report in response to the off-site review; 4) MCU submission of a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to improve student learning; 5) an on-site review and report by a different SACSCOC Committee of evaluators to finalize assessment of compliance, address issues of non-compliance, and evaluate acceptability of the QEP; 6) review by the SACSCOC Committee on Compliance and Reports (C&R) of the evaluating committees' reports (and institutional responses, if any); 7) review by the SACSCOC Executive Council of the C&R recommendation; and 8) final determination by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees on reaffirmation and any monitoring activities it may require for identified deficiencies, if any. The Fifth Year Interim Report between re-affirmation reviews is required to assess progress toward implementing the approved QEP and demonstrate compliance with selected requirements from the Principles of Accreditation identified by SACSCOC the year before the interim report is due.

3. Policy

a. Maintaining institutional accreditation is of the highest priority, second only to ensuring that educational programs meet service and joint professional education requirements. MCU policies, procedures, and practices will comply with relevant SACSCOC policies and the accreditation standards reflected in the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation at reference (b).

b. MCU headquarters primary staff and program directors will familiarize themselves with the provisions of reference (b) and will be guided by reference (c) in the development of policies, processes, and practices, where applicable. In particular, the provisions of reference (d), SACSCOC policy regarding the fundamental "Principle of Integrity" – which requires MCU to be completely candid in self-assessment and honest in dealing with SACSCOC – will apply to all of MCU's activities.

c. The MCU Principles of Accreditation responsibility matrix (see related policies and forms below) designates VP oversight, primary office lead, and supporting elements on each Principle of Accreditation, for ensuring MCU policies, practices, and procedures meet established standards. The designated office will also be responsible for drafting compliance narratives for SACSCOC required reports. The Accreditation Working Group charter (see related policies and forms below) codifies the establishment of an Accreditation Working Group to coordinate and oversee the execution of accreditation requirements.

d. The Provost will develop and publish a schedule of designated key personnel, program directors, and faculty and staff to attend the SACSCOC Annual Meetings and/or other relevant SACSCOC orientation and training events when required. The Provost is delegated authority to revise the MCU Principles of Accreditation responsibility matrix and the Accreditation Working Group charter when and as needed to ensure compliance with institutional accreditation requirements.

e. Substantive Changes. Substantive changes are defined in reference (e). Depending on the type of change, the University has a responsibility to either notify or seek approval from SACSCOC prior to implementing any significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of our academic programs, which meet the definition of substantive change in reference (e).

4. Procedures. In order to implement accreditation requirements in a systematic manner, MCU has developed a unique, organizational structure within the Marine Corps and instituted various standard means of review and assessment.

a. A Board of Visitors (BOV), appointed by the Secretary of the Navy, composed of experienced educators and senior retired military members, serves as an advisory board to the President, MCU on institutional matters. It normally meets twice a year, in the fall and spring.

b. The Provost serves as the Chief Academic Officer to the President, MCU, and oversees the implementation of accreditation requirements. Within the Academic Affairs department, the Director, Academic Support Division, serves as the MCU Institutional Accreditation Liaison to SACSCOC.

c. The Provost has overall cognizance of MCU substantive changes and will ensure that the directors of all educational programs and administrative and educational support units are aware of what constitutes a substantive change. It is the responsibility of these directors to report to the Provost any proposed changes that meet these requirements. The venues for addressing these proposed changes and for ensuring that appropriate reporting requirements are met are educational program reviews and President's Planning Council (PPC) meetings. Based on the recommendation of the PPC, the President, MCU will either approve or deny the proposed change. If approved, the Institutional Accreditation Liaison will notify or submit the proposal for substantive change to SACSCOC, as applicable.

d. A Faculty Council, chaired by a faculty member chosen by its members, is authorized to provide direct and independent advice and recommendations to the President, MCU on all matters of institutional governance.

e. The Vice-President for Operations and Plans (VPOP) oversees MCU's institutional effectiveness program through the Director, Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP). IRAP manages the MCU data collection and analysis process and prepares appropriate reports of effectiveness.

f. An Accreditation Working Group, under Provost oversight, will monitor compliance with accreditation requirements and coordinate their execution.

Related Policies and Forms:

MCU Principles of Accreditation responsibility matrix

Accreditation Working Group charter

Board of Visitors

List of SACSCOC Required Policies

Faculty Council Charter

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IRAP Plan
Quality Enhancement Plan
VPOP Regs (PPC)

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