



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANT INSTITUTIONS**

### **Policy Statement**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is an institutional accreditor for quality assurance in higher education. SACSCOC accredits institutions that award associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees, including those offered via distance and correspondence education, and direct assessment within these institutions. It serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among its members in the United States and international institutions of higher education approved by the SACSCOC Executive Council, Board of Trustees, and the Appeals Committee of the College Delegate Assembly. Applications, including narrative and documents demonstrating compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, must be in English. Audits must be presented in U.S. dollars and all notes in the audits must be in English.

**Note to International Institutions:** SACSCOC does not accept applications from institutions that are in violation of fundamental human rights or that present potential danger to peer evaluators or SACSCOC staff.

SACSCOC will not accept applications from, or send Candidacy or Initial Accreditation Committees to, institutions located in countries with a Level 4 travel advisory issued by the U.S. Department of State ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)), until such time that the advisory is lifted. Applications from institutions located within countries with a Level 3 travel advisory may be accepted at the discretion of the President of SACSCOC, and Candidacy or Initial Accreditation Committees may be authorized by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, if the cause for the travel advisory is determined to be restricted to a geographic area of the country that is not in close proximity to the institution or if the institution is able to make sufficient arrangements to mitigate the concern raised by the travel advisory.

The accreditation procedures outlined in this policy apply to a degree-granting institution of higher education seeking accreditation with SACSCOC. SACSCOC does not accredit multiple degree-granting institutions that comprise a system as an individual member, nor does it accept a single application for more than one degree-granting institution that seeks accreditation. For additional information, refer to the SACSCOC policy, [\*Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution\*](#). Each applicant institution must submit a separate application.

Former SACSCOC-accredited institutions seeking to regain membership must follow the procedures outlined in this policy unless they qualify for the accreditation pathways provided in one of the following policies: [\*Accreditation Procedures for Affiliates\*](#) or [\*Application for SACSCOC Accreditation from an Institution Currently Accredited by an Institutional Accreditor Recognized by the United States Department of Education\*](#).

Entities which are a part of an institution accredited by SACSCOC and which wish to seek separate accreditation should refer to the SACSCOC Policy Statement [Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution](#) on its website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).

The [Application for Membership](#) and the [Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement](#) may be found on the SACSCOC website under Application Information. Communication concerning membership may be addressed to the President of SACSCOC and/or to the staff member assigned to work with pre-applicant and applicant institutions.

The SACSCOC philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education in its region or an international institution on any basis other than failure to comply with the Core Requirements and Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* established by the College Delegate Assembly or failure to comply with the policies and procedures of SACSCOC. The Board of Trustees of SACSCOC uniformly applies the *Principles of Accreditation* to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions.

All final decisions regarding the candidacy or accreditation status of an institution are made by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Denial of candidacy, removal from candidacy, and denial of membership are appealable actions.

An institution seeking SACSCOC membership must complete the [Application for Membership](#) documenting its compliance with the and the relevant standards of the *Principles of Accreditation* as approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The completed application constitutes a primary source of information used by SACSCOC to determine apparent compliance with the requirements and standards listed above, which are basic expectations of institutions seeking Candidacy, the initial status with SACSCOC. Compliance with these requirements and standards, however, is not sufficient to warrant initial membership. After gaining Candidacy status, institutions must demonstrate both continued compliance with these requirements and standards and compliance with all the remaining Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

**Note: An application which fails to provide evidence of degree-granting authority as required by the state or country in which the institution submitting the application is located will not be accepted and the institution will be notified by the President of SACSCOC that the application has been withdrawn from consideration. The institution may submit another application when it can provide appropriate evidence of degree-granting authority.**

Institutions are required to notify SACSCOC in writing if it does not intend to participate in title IV HEA programs per 34 CFR § 602.16 (b) and affirm that decision under this standard. All subsequent awards of candidacy or accreditation status will note whether an institution has requested not to include participation in title IV HEA programs in its accreditation. Institutions not participating in title IV HEA programs are not required to document compliance with federal responsibilities, but are required to document compliance with state responsibilities, if applicable. See [Title IV Program Responsibilities](#).

An institution may withdraw its application or its status as a Candidate institution at any time prior to a decision of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. If an institution withdraws its application and later decides to again seek membership, it must submit a new application.

An applying institution bears the cost of application fees as well as the direct and indirect costs of visits. See the section of this policy entitled “Fees and Other Expenses for Applicant and Candidate Institutions.”

**Note: Substantive Change**

An applying institution describes itself in its initial application. Therefore, from the date of submission of an application to the date of awarding of Membership, the institution must secure SACSCOC approval for any substantive change as defined by the SACSCOC policy, [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#). Should the institution find it necessary to initiate a substantive change, that action may have significant impact on the accreditation process as follows:

During the Application for Membership process, the institution may not initiate any changes of a substantive nature without prior approval of the SACSCOC President. If an institution is considering a substantive change during the Application for Membership process, it must notify the SACSCOC President to verify that the change does not preclude the institution from proceeding with the Application for Membership process. Should the institution initiate a substantive change without prior approval by the SACSCOC President before authorization to receive an Accreditation Committee visit, the institution may be required to submit a new application which includes the change. If an institution implements a substantive change after it has been authorized to receive an Accreditation Committee, its authorization may be revoked at the discretion of the SACSCOC President, and the institution may be required to submit a new application which includes the change prior to Accreditation Committee reauthorization

#### **Note: Institutional Contingency Teach-Out Plan**

An applicant institution is required to submit an Institutional Contingency Teach-Out Plan for review by the Candidacy Committee and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. An institutional contingency teach-out plan ensures students completing the teach-out would meet curricular requirements for professional licensure or certification, if any, and which must include a list of academic programs offered by the institution and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach out agreement with the institution.

If the institution does not receive initial accreditation within two years of becoming a candidate, the institution will remain a candidate upon the condition that only the currently enrolled students have had a reasonable time to complete the activities in its teach-out plan. To assist students in transferring or completing their programs, the institution will remain in candidacy status, but for no more than 120 additional days unless approved by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for Good Cause. For information on the content of this teach-out plan, see the [Appendix](#) to this policy.

## **Procedure for Achieving Membership with SACSCOC**

### **1. Mandatory Attendance at Workshops for Pre-Applicant Institutions**

Prior to submission of an application for membership, an institution must attend a virtual mandatory Pre- Applicant Workshop. Information concerning registering for the workshops may be obtained by visiting the SACSCOC website ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)) under Application Information. Institutions interested in understanding the process to determine whether to apply or not may also wish to attend the workshops. The workshops acquaint attendees with the accreditation process and with the standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

### **2. Submission of an Application and Initial Review of the Application**

An institution seeking membership must first submit an application describing the characteristics of the institution and documenting its compliance with the relevant standards in the [Application for Membership](#) as well as the following required financial documents: .

- a. separate institutional audits and management letters (audits opinioned on the institution) for its

three most recent fiscal years, including the audit for the most recent fiscal year ending prior to the date of the application. Should the end of another fiscal year occur during initial review of the application by SACSCOC staff, that audit must be submitted before review of the application can be completed. In addition, the audit for the three (3) most recently completed fiscal year must be provided when seeking authorization by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to receive an Accreditation Committee visit.

- b. an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board.
- c. a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt (short- and long-term debt attached to physical assets) which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year.

Further, throughout the remainder of the process the institution must provide a separate audit and management letter for the most recently completed fiscal year ending prior to any committee visit or Board of Trustees review for (re)authorization of a Candidacy Committee, an Accreditation Committee, or initial Membership. All audits must be conducted by independent certified public accountants or an appropriate governmental auditing agency. An applicant or candidate institution may not show 1) an annual operating deficit from the time of application to award of initial membership, or 2) a cumulative operating deficit across the years presented as documentation.

### 3. Review of the Application by SACSCOC Staff and Submission of Additional Information by the Institution

SACSCOC staff members will conduct an initial review of the application within six months of receipt and will provide the institution with a written assessment of the application. If additional information is needed before review can be completed, SACSCOC staff will hold a virtual meeting with representatives of the institution to discuss the application, the requests for additional information, and the timeline for next steps in the process.

The application review process (beginning with receipt of the completed application and ending with authorization of the Candidacy Committee) can, on average, be accomplished within a period of twelve to eighteen months. The maximum period from the time the initial application is received by SACSCOC to the time that the Candidacy Committee is authorized should not exceed 18 months. Should the institution not receive authorization to receive a Candidacy Committee visit within 18 months after submitting its initial application materials, its application may be withdrawn at the discretion of the President of SACSCOC. Should the institution wish to reapply at a future time, it will be required to submit a new application along with the appropriate application fee.

### 4. Authorization of a Candidacy Committee Visit and the Granting of Candidacy Status

To be authorized to receive a Candidacy Committee visit, the institution must demonstrate through narrative and documentation in the application compliance with the relevant standards in the [Application for Membership](#), including financial resources requirements noted above in this document.

After review of the application and review of requested additional information submitted by the institution, if SACSCOC staff members determine that the institution appears to have presented a sufficient case for compliance with all standards included in the [Application for Membership](#), staff will refer the [Application for Membership](#) to the SACSCOC President for action. The President may authorize a Candidacy Committee visit or may deny such authorization. If the authorization is denied, the institution may request that its [Application for Membership](#) be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review.

If SACSCOC staff cannot determine whether the institution appears to have presented a sufficient case for compliance with all standards included in the [Application for Membership](#), the institution will be offered the option of withdrawing the [Application for Membership](#) or requesting that it be referred to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action. The Board of Trustees may authorize a Candidacy Committee to visit the institution, or it may deny such authorization. If authorization is denied, the application process ends. The institution may submit another application in the future at its discretion. Denial of a Candidacy Committee visit is not appealable.

5. The Candidacy Committee Visit, the Granting of Candidacy Status, and Authorization of an Accreditation Committee Visit

If a Candidacy Committee visit is authorized, a SACSCOC staff member is assigned to the institution and will consult with the institution concerning a date for the Candidacy Committee visit and the scheduling of an advisory visit to assist the institution in preparing for the visit. The Candidacy Committee visit must occur within one year of authorization. After that time, Candidacy Committee authorization expires, unless an extension is approved by the SACSCOC President.

The Candidacy Committee will typically consist of eight committee members who will verify on site whether the institution complies with relevant standards as required in the [Application for Membership](#). The Committee will write a report describing its findings. This report along with the institution's response to this report will be provided to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The institution has a minimum of two weeks after receiving the report of the Candidacy Committee to respond to the Candidacy Committee Report. The Candidacy Committee report and institutional response must be submitted to the SACSCOC Board agenda for either the June or December meeting immediately following the visit. The institution should talk with their assigned SACSCOC staff member regarding the response deadlines for SACSCOC Board meeting agendas to make an informed decision regarding timing.

The Candidacy Committee Report and the institution's response to the report, should it wish to provide one, will be reviewed by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. At the discretion of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the Board may schedule the institution to appear before a Committee on Compliance and Reports of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a meeting on the record to provide evidence to further inform the decision of the Board regarding the institution. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award Candidacy and authorize an Initial Accreditation Committee to visit the institution, may continue the institution as an Applicant and authorize a second Candidacy Committee, or may deny Candidacy.

If the SACSCOC Board grants Candidacy and authorizes an Initial Accreditation Committee to visit the institution, the Accreditation Committee visit must occur within two years of the date that the institution was granted Candidacy status.

If the SACSCOC Board continues the institution and an Applicant and authorizes a second Candidacy Committee, the institution must submit its original [Application for Membership](#), its original Response Report to the first Candidacy Committee, and a new Focused Report addressing the standards identified in the action letter from the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The Candidacy Committee visit must occur within one year of authorization. After that time, the Candidacy Committee authorization expires, unless an extension is approved by the SACSCOC President.

If the institution is denied Candidacy, the application process ends. The institution may submit another application along with application fees at its discretion. Denial of Candidacy is appealable. (See the SACSCOC policy, [The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly](#) on the SACSCOC website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).)

The awarding of Candidacy status indicates that the institution has demonstrated compliance with the requirements and relevant standards required in the [Application for Membership](#) and that this compliance has been verified by a Candidacy Committee which has visited the institution.

If the institution is awarded Candidacy status, it will be authorized to receive an Initial Accreditation Committee visit. It must complete the *Compliance Certification for New Members* documenting compliance with all standards. It must then host the Accreditation Committee visit.

Candidacy is effective on the date that the SACSCOC Board of Trustees takes action to grant Candidacy. An institution may remain in Candidacy status for a maximum of four years.

## 6. The Accreditation Committee Visit and Subsequent Actions

If an Initial Accreditation Committee visit is authorized, the SACSCOC staff member assigned to the institution and will consult with the institution concerning a date for the Accreditation Committee visit and the scheduling of an advisory visit to assist the institution in preparing for the visit. The SACSCOC staff member assigned to the institution will visit the institution to discuss arrangements for the Accreditation Committee and to discuss completion of the *Compliance Certification for New Members*.

The institution may not initiate other substantive changes during the time period between submission of the *Compliance Certification For New Members* through final action on SACSCOC accreditation.

After completion of the *Compliance Certification for New Members*, the institution will host the Accreditation Committee visit. This Committee will evaluate the institution's compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* and write an Accreditation Committee Report which will be sent to a Committee on Compliance and Reports and to the institution. The chief executive officer of the institution will be invited to review the report, and the institution will be invited to prepare a written response to any recommendations made by the Accreditation Committee. The response must be submitted no later than the date requested by staff. The report of the Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to that report are forwarded to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action at either the Board's June or December Meeting. Action on the report of a visiting committee must take place no later than the second Board of Trustees meeting following the committee visit.

At the discretion of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the Board may schedule the institution to appear before a Committee on Compliance and Reports of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a meeting on the record to provide evidence to further inform the decision of the Board regarding the institution.

Possible actions following the first Accreditation Committee visit are as follows: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation) with or without a Monitoring Report, Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action), or Grant Continued Candidacy. If an institution is Continued in Candidacy, the possible actions following a second Accreditation Committee visit are: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation) or Deny Membership and Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action). These actions are described below.

### The Awarding of Membership after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award Membership after review of the Accreditation Committee Report and the institution's response. The awarding of membership occurs if the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its standing committees judge that the institution has: 1) documented compliance

with the standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*, 2) met the financial requirements listed above (under item 2) in this document, 3) been in operation, i.e., has without interruption enrolled students in degree programs through at least one complete degree program cycle, and 4) has graduated at least one class at the level of the highest degree offered by the institution prior to the action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award initial accreditation with a Monitoring Report, at its discretion, if the Board determines that the institution is non-compliant with a standard that it determines has the potential to be resolved within six months. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may not award initial accreditation if the institution is non-compliant with a Core Requirement.

Membership is retroactive to January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' action to grant initial accreditation.

After award of initial Membership, an institution must undergo reaffirmation in five years. Thereafter, the institution is reaffirmed every ten years.

#### Denial of Membership and Removal from Candidacy after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

After review of the report of the Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to the report, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees may remove an institution from Candidacy if the institution has failed to comply with Core Requirements of the *Principles of Accreditation* and/or has failed to provide strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the Standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*. Upon removal from Candidacy, the process ends. An institution removed from Candidacy may submit another application at its discretion. Removal from Candidacy is appealable. (See the SACSCOC policy, [The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly](#) on the SACSCOC website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).)

#### The Granting of Continued Candidacy and Subsequent Action after the First Accreditation Committee Visit

The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may grant Continued Candidacy status after review of the Accreditation Committee Report and the institution's response. The granting of Continued Candidacy will occur if the institution has not yet demonstrated compliance with requirements and/or standards such that subsequent substantial documentation of compliance is necessary. The institution must have provided strong evidence that it is making adequate progress toward complying with the *Principles of Accreditation* and that it will fully comply with the requirements and standards within four years of being granted Candidacy despite findings of non-compliance cited by the Accreditation Committee.

If Continued Candidacy is granted after the first Accreditation Committee visit, a second Accreditation Committee visit will be authorized to visit the institution after which the institution will be placed on the agenda of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and its review committees no later than four years after the date the institution was granted Candidacy. If the SACSCOC Board continues the institution as a Candidate and authorizes a second Accreditation Committee, the institution must submit its original *Compliance Certification for New Members*, its original Response Report to the first Accreditation Committee's report, and a new Focused Report addressing the standards identified in the action letter from the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. The Accreditation Committee visit must occur within two years of authorization. After that time, Accreditation Committee authorization expires, unless an extension is approved by the SACSCOC President and the maximum four years in Candidacy has not expired..

The report of the Accreditation Committee and the institution's response to that report are forwarded to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for action at either the Board's June or December Meeting. Action

on the report of a visiting committee must take place no later than the second Board of Trustees meeting following the committee visit. At the discretion of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, the institution may schedule the institution to appear before a Committee on Compliance and Reports of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for a meeting on the record to provide evidence to further inform the decision of the Board regarding the institution. The possible actions following a second Accreditation Committee visit are: Award Membership (Initial Accreditation) with or without a Monitoring Report or Deny Membership and Remove from Candidacy (an appealable action). The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may award initial accreditation with a Monitoring Report, at its discretion, if the Board determines that the institution is non-compliant with a standard that it determines has the potential to be resolved within six months. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees may not award initial accreditation if the institution is non-compliant with a Core Requirement.

#### The Awarding of Membership after the Second Accreditation Committee Visit

If the SACSCOC Board of Trustees finds that the institution has documented compliance with the requirements and standards and met all requirements as listed above for membership, it will award Membership. Membership is retroactive to January 1<sup>st</sup> of the year of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees' action to grant initial accreditation. After award of initial Membership, an institution must undergo reaffirmation in five years. Thereafter, the institution is reaffirmed every ten years.

#### Denial of Membership and Removal from Candidacy after the Second Accreditation Committee Visit

If the SACSCOC Board of Trustees denies Membership, the institution will be removed from Candidacy and the application and Candidate process ends. The decision is appealable. (See the SACSCOC policy, [The Appeals Procedures of the College Delegate Assembly](#) on the SACSCOC website, [www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org).)

## **Fees and Other Expenses for Applicant and Candidate Institutions**

The institution will be required to pay a pre-applicant workshop fee, an application fee, staff advisory fee, and to assume all expenses incurred by the SACSCOC staff and the Candidacy Committee and Accreditation Committee while conducting the work of the SACSCOC in accordance with the SACSCOC policy, [Dues, Fees, and Expenses](#)..

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## APPENDIX

### Submitting an Institutional Contingency Teach-Out Plan

An institutional contingency teach-out plan addresses must address the numbered items below. For simplicity and to help ensure completeness, use the numbered items as a template for creating a teach-out plan; retain the item numbers and descriptions as provided. If an item is not applicable, provide a brief explanation; do not delete the item or leave it blank. The teach-out plan content is based on federal requirements.

1. Communication
  - a. Describe a communication plan to inform students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders of the institution's closure. The plan
    - i. must not rely on a single medium (e.g., email only),
    - ii. must be appropriate to each stakeholder,
    - iii. must include how it will inform students how to access transcripts, other academic records (such as advising plans), financial records (such as payments due to the institution), and financial aid records (such as loan processors), and
    - iv. must explain how it will inform students of any additional costs associated with teach-out options.
2. Student academic records
  - a. Describe a plan to preserve and make available to former students all academic transcripts including validations/confirmations of academic credentials awarded to former students.
  - b. Identify the party to whom academic records will be entrusted and include a physical address and contact information.
  - c. Identify any state or other governmental agency requirement regarding disposition of academic records.
  - d. Describe a plan to inform current and former students how they may request transcript copies.
  - e. Include a description of any encumbrances placed on access to academic records such as withholding transcript copies if a former student has an outstanding balance owed *to the institution*.
3. Student accounts receivable
  - a. Describe a plan to collect outstanding balances owed *to the institution* by students and former students after the closure.
  - b. Include a description of how students and former students will be informed of the institution's intention to collect.
4. Refunds and loan discharges
  - a. Describe a plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on State refund policies.
5. Re-employment
  - a. Explain how the institution will assist faculty and staff in finding new employment.
6. Programs
  - a. Provide a list of all academic programs offered by the institution for all credentials (e.g., certificates, diplomas, degrees) and for all instructional levels (undergraduate and graduate).
  - b. The program list must include for *each* program

- i. at least two teach-out institutions offering comparable programs where students could complete their program of study, and
  - ii. for each program / teach-out institution combination,
    - 1. a statement of assurance that the method of delivery is comparable,
    - 2. a good faith assessment of the number and types of credits each teach-out institution is willing to accept prior to students' enrollment,
    - 3. a statement of assurance that the curricular requirements at the teach-out institution meet requirements for professional licensure or certification as applicable to the program,
    - 4. a statement of assurance that students are not required to move or travel substantial distances or durations with possible exceptions for highly specialized programs, and
    - 5. the institution's plan to provide a clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.
- 7. Teach-out institutions
  - a. Provide a list of all institutions identified as offering comparable programs where students could complete their programs of study to include
    - i. the name and web address of each institution,
    - ii. the institution's accreditor or accreditor(s),
    - iii. a good faith statement of assurance that the institution is in good standing with its institutional accreditor(s), the U.S. Department of Education, and is not under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.
- 8. Students
  - a. Provide a list of all enrolled students by academic program to include each student's current progress to completion
- 9. Teach-out agreements (optional at the institution's discretion)
  - a. A teach-out agreement is usually required if any significant consideration *other than* the transfer of academic credit is agreed upon between the institution and a teach-out institution. If the teach-out institution is only transferring credit and making no additional consideration for students covered under a teach-out plan, then the institutions are, in essence, executing a transfer articulation agreement and a teach-out agreement is not necessary. Teach-out agreements are subject to approval separate from the approval of the teach-out plan.