

Joint Degrees Policy

DEFINITION

A joint degree program is one in which a program is offered collaboratively by two or more accredited institutions and leads to the award of a single degree issued jointly by participating institutions.

CONSULTATION WITH WSCUC

Institutions should consult with their WSCUC staff liaison with questions regarding proposed joint degree programs and are encouraged to review Commission expectations regarding academic programs and degree requirements by consulting Standard 2 in the [2013 Handbook of Accreditation](#). While the Standards of Accreditation (the Standards) and the Criteria for Review (CFRs) as a whole provide a framework for institutional self-evaluation, CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 provide guidance on content, structure, nomenclature, and expectations for student achievement for baccalaureate and graduate degree programs.

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS AND POLICIES FOR JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS

Institutions are expected to design and operate joint degree offerings in conformity with the Standards and relevant policies. In particular, institutions must ensure the integrity of operations and quality of programs and courses leading to degrees that they award.

The following aspects of such programs are of special importance. Institutions offering joint degrees are expected to have clear written plans to offer, monitor and assess these programs and to enter into clear written agreements with partnering institutions, which address, as appropriate, the matters below. Citations to relevant CFRs in the Standards and to WSCUC policies are provided.

1. The program is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives (CFRs 1.1, 1.2).
2. The primary purpose of the degree program is educational (CFR 1.5).
3. The degree awarded represents a coherent course of study that is in keeping with the quality of other degree programs offered by the WSCUC-accredited institution (Standard 2 and CFRs 2.1, 2.2).
4. Sound practices are employed for the award of credit (CFR 2.1 and [Transfer Credit Policy](#)).
5. The program is approved by the faculty and administration of the institution in keeping with its usual decision-making processes (CFRs 3.7-3.10).
6. The program is designed and operated in keeping with all relevant Standards and policies. In particular, the institution takes responsibility for the following aspects of the program:
 - a. Truthful representations about the program (CFR 1.6; also see Public Disclosure Requirements below)
 - b. Offerings that allow students to complete the program in a timely fashion (CFR 1.6)
 - c. Appropriate practices in the recruitment of students (CFR 1.6 and relevant federal policies)
 - d. Sound business operations and record keeping (CFR 1.7)
 - e. Appropriate program level, content, and standards (CFR 2.1, 2.2)

- f. Adoption of student learning outcomes, expectations for student achievement, and means to assess student achievement (CFRs 2.3-2.6, 4.3-4.7)
- g. Application of institutional quality assurance processes, including program review (CFR 2.7, 4.1)
- h. Appropriate analysis of student needs, satisfaction, and success (CFR 2.10)
- i. Advising and other services to support student success (CFR 2.10-2.14)
- j. Admission of students in keeping with the program level (CFR 2.2 and 2.12)
- k. Sufficient and qualified faculty and staff (CFRs 2.1 and 3.1)
- l. Information resources, technology and facilities appropriate to the program (CFR 3.5)
- m. Teach-out plans that protect the students ([Teach-out Plans and Agreements Policy](#))
- n. Sound planning and budgeting (CFR 3.4, 4.6).

STATUS OF AND RELATIONSHIP WITH PARTNER INSTITUTION(S)

Joint degrees may be offered by WSCUC-accredited institutions in partnership with many other kinds of institutions. These include other WSCUC-accredited institutions, other regionally accredited institutions, other educational institutions with national or specialized accreditation that is recognized by the United States Department of Education (ED), or educational institutions in other countries. Joint degrees with unaccredited entities in the US are not allowed under this policy.

The joint degree program must be subject to a detailed agreement with the partnering institution(s) that fully describes all aspects of the relationship. (See the section above on Application of Standards and Policies to Joint Degree Programs for matters that should be covered in plans and agreements.) If the partnering institution is not accredited by WSCUC, the agreement must assure that the WSCUC-accredited institution has sufficient authority over the program in keeping with sound educational practices and the Standards of Accreditation.

Institutions seeking to partner with an international institution that is not accredited by a USDOE recognized accrediting agency must take steps to ensure that the partnering entity is appropriately licensed, approved or otherwise recognized by an appropriate governmental entity. Institutions should also exercise due diligence in investigating such entities to assure themselves of the quality of their offerings and the integrity of their operations.

A WSCUC-accredited institution seeking to partner with another institution to offer a degree program with shared coursework in the same discipline should also see the [Dual Degrees Policy](#). A dual degree program is defined as a program of study offered collaboratively by two institutions that leads to the award of a separate degree from each of the participating institutions.

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS

The Commission expects that a substantial proportion of the credit awarded toward the joint degree is earned in courses offered by the WSCUC-accredited institution and taught by its faculty.

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

Institutions offering joint degree programs must take steps to ensure that students and the public fully understand the accredited status of the institutions offering the degree.

Required Disclaimers

When the partnering institution is not accredited by WSCUC, the institution must make clear in all written communications with students and the public that its accreditation by WSCUC does not extend to the partner institution. To this end, the following disclaimer must be used:

“[Name of member institution] is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission of the United States of America. [Name of partnering entity or institution] is [accredited or approved] by [the name of the agency].”

APPLICATION OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

Institutions seeking to offer a joint degree with a partner institution that is not accredited by WSCUC or another ED-approved accrediting agency must obtain approval through the WSCUC Substantive Change process prior to offering the program.

Institutions seeking to offer a joint degree with a partner institution that is accredited by WSCUC or another ED-approved accrediting agency are exempt from the Substantive Change approval process only if both institutions are approved by their respective accrediting agencies to offer programs at the level (bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate) at which the new degree program will be offered without obtaining advance approval through the Substantive Change process.

Please refer to the [Substantive Change Manual](#) for specific guidance on substantive change policies that apply to joint degree programs.

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