To: Graduate Council and Undergraduate Council

CC: Cody Edwards, Associate Provost, Graduate Education
Bethany Usher, Associate Provost, Undergraduate Education

From: Claudia Rector, Assistant Provost, Academic Affairs

Re: Reminders of key SCHEV and SACSCOC policies

Date: February 7, 2017

This memo serves to remind the members of the Graduate and Undergraduate Councils of four key policies (two each from SCHEV and SACSCOC) relevant to the work of these bodies. **Please consult the actual policies and/or contact me at crector@gmu.edu or 703-993-8679 with any questions.**

1. SCHEV degree program common core requirements
2. SCHEV program modifications
3. SACSCOC substantive change reporting requirements
4. SACSCOC faculty qualifications requirements

1. SCHEV Degree Program Common Core Requirements
Policy: Approval of Program Actions at Public Institutions
http://www.schev.edu/docs/default-source/institution-section/GuidancePolicy/academic-approval-policies/2016-academicapprovalpolicy.pdf (p. 2 of 49)

The policy reads:

> **Degree Program Common Core Requirements**
> Curriculum leading to the award of an associate's, bachelor's, master's, professional, or doctoral degree; is identified by a separate CIP code in the SCHEV program inventory; and, is listed on the student diploma. All curricula under the CIP code share a common core of courses. Various groupings of fewer courses may be used to define a variety of related support areas that do not appear on the diploma. Support areas are designated as: concentration, emphasis, focus, major, option, or track. Support areas developed after a degree program has been approved by Council must maintain the focus of the

degree program and the common core requirement of the degree program. Council approval is not required to add new support areas to an existing degree program.

Common core requirements:
- Bachelor's degree: 25% of total credit hours required for the degree, excluding general
  education core
- Master's degree: 50%* of total credit hours required for the degree
- Doctor[al] degree: 25% of total credit hours required for the degree

* Consideration will be given to degree programs that adequately justify a core curriculum with less than 50%.

Important notes on interpretation
- Please note that for the bachelor's degree, the policy refers to the *entire degree program*, i.e., the 120 credit program, not the major. ***In practice, this means that every undergraduate <u>major</u> must have a required common core of at least 20 credits.*** (120 credits – 40 for general education = 80 credits / 4 = 20 credits.)
- Menus: You may use a menu (e.g., "three courses from the following list") but sparingly. SCHEV staff have indicated that one is okay, maybe two, but there is no policy definition on this subject and in practice it will be subject to staff interpretation.
- Note that there is no requirement for certificates.

Enforcement
SCHEV will enforce this policy going forward, but right now there is no mechanism for requiring existing programs that are out of compliance to change. New programs must comply with the common core requirement, as must any programs making changes that require SCHEV notification or approval.   Programs that do not have the required common core will not be approved by SCHEV.

However, for programs that are making changes that do not require reporting to SCHEV, the situation is more complex. The Office of the Provost will not use the presentation of degree program actions to the Graduate or Undergraduate Councils to force the establishment of a common core in cases in which the changes do not have to be reported to SCHEV; however, for practical reasons, academic units are advised to move into alignment with the policy whenever feasible to avoid having to completely reconfigure a degree program when eventually a change requiring SCHEV notification or approval is desired.

2. SCHEV Program Modifications

http://www.schev.edu/docs/default-source/institution-section/GuidancePolicy/academic-approval-policies/2016-academicapprovalpolicy.pdf (pp. 6-7 of 49)

SCHEV has defined certain program actions as modifications that require notification or approval. These include:

- Changes in the degree program delivery format from what it was in the original proposal approved by SCHEV
- Changes to licensure-qualifying status of a course of study
- Significant changes to the core curriculum, purpose, focus or identity of the program
- Total credit hour changes to the program.

Modifications of degree programs are classified as "simple" or "substantial," with predictable differences in the approval process.

3. SACSCOC Substantive Change Reporting Requirements

Mason is also required to report what SACSCOC defines as "substantive changes." These include, but are not limited to:

- Adding 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
- Closing a program, off-campus site, branch campus or institution
- Initiating programs or courses through contractual agreement or consortium
- Initiating programs or courses through direct assessment (i.e., competency-based)
- Initiating off-campus instructional sites
- Establishment of a branch campus
- Initiating joint or dual degree programs with another institution
- Initiating a certificate program – typically for workforce development—at a new off-campus site (if a previously approved program) or that is a significant departure from previously approved programs
- Altering significantly the length of a program
- Initiating degree completion programs

Please note that Mason has a policy placing responsibility for reporting with the deans (note the procedures that require notification to me or to Michelle Marks.) This policy is located at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/reporting-and-approval-of-academic-actions-constituting-substantive-change/.

The full SACSCOC policy is available here, but it's quite lengthy and somewhat confusing: http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/SubstantiveChange.pdf.

4.   SACSCOC Faculty Qualifications Requirements

SACSCOC maintains a policy describing required qualifications for faculty to teach at different levels. The *general* rule of thumb is that a faculty member needs a master's degree to teach at the undergraduate level and a doctoral degree to teach at the graduate level; however, there are also constraints in terms of discipline. Graduate teaching assistants must have 18 graduate credits in the teaching discipline, and they must be trained, supervised and evaluated by faculty. (Mason has historically interpreted this to refer to graduate teaching assistants who are teaching courses independently, not those who are just grading or more literally *assisting* a faculty member who is teaching a course.)

For every course, an academic unit must consider three things before making an appointment:

Degree level + Degree discipline + Teaching discipline

If you have any questions about whether an individual faculty member is qualified to teach a given course, please contact me. The university does make exceptions, but these must be made sparingly and with great care.   Exceptions are made in the case of substantial professional experience or the specific contours of particular disciplines.

The SACSCOC policy is available at
http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/faculty%20credentials.pdf.   Mason's policy echoes SACSCOC's, however, it focuses equally on the documentation element.
http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/faculty-credential-evaluation-and-documentation/
Unfortunately, SACSCOC requires that we obtain an original transcript for all faculty (with very rare exceptions.)