CHANGING THE DESIGNATION OF AN ACADEMIC UNIT FROM SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

Policy Type: Board of Visitors
Responsible Office: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
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Policy Statement and Purpose

This policy establishes the definition for a school and college and outlines the criteria and procedures for changing the designation of a school or a college. Changing the designation of a school or college requires the agreement of the unit dean and a substantive rationale for the change in designation as well as the approval of the President’s Cabinet, provost and Board of Visitors. The change in designation requires State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) approval and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) notification.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

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Who Should Know This Policy

All deans, vice provosts, vice presidents and other senior executives are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

College
A college (with the two exceptions detailed below) is a large academic unit with a broad scope of degree granting programs covering multiple disciplines. A college may contain schools, university chartered centers, and/or institutes. The multiple departments contained in a college require specific expertise to administer broad disciplines and execute administrative and budget responsibilities. Departments within a college are led by a chair or director. Colleges are overseen by a dean who reports to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs chief academic officer of the institution.

At VCU, the Honor’s College and the University College stand as the only exceptions to the aforementioned college designation definition.

School
A school is an academic unit focused on teaching and research in a single disciplinary area. A school is typically constituted by a small number of departments or divisions, but in some cases the school may itself function as a single large department. Schools typically offer a focused scope of degree programs. In some cases, a school may only offer a single degree or a focal program with most of the school’s enrollment plus a small handful of peripheral degree offerings. Schools are typically led by a chief officer who has administrative and budget responsibility and the title Dean; the title may be (Executive) Director depending on the school’s place within the overall governance of the institution. If the school is within a college, the chief officer may report to the college dean. If it is a freestanding academic unit, the dean may report to the chief academic officer of the institution.

While the distinctions between a college and a school are highlighted, neither suggest that one entity is of greater stature than another. Instead, the distinction between a college or school is based on the disciplinary foci, national landscape and institutional perspectives.

Contacts

The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs officially interprets this policy and is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by the policy Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.
Policy Specifics and Procedures

A change in school designation is considered as an organizational change according to SCHEV. As such, the organizational change must be approved by SCHEV prior to implementation. The organizational change must also be reported to SACSCOC prior to implementation.

1. **Obtaining pre-approvals:** To ensure that changing the designation of a school or college fits university priorities, the dean of the school/college must first discuss the change in designation with the provost. Once the provost agrees to the designation change, the dean of the school/college must have their staff complete the organizational change template.

2. **Obtaining internal formal approvals:** The formal approval process for the designation change must take the completed organizational change template along with an executive summary to the Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs for guidance regarding the university review process.
   - A proposal is created by the dean based on input and support from the faculty.
   - The dean presents the proposal for comment to the Council of Deans.
   - The proposal is then reviewed and approved by the provost or provost designee.
   - The next step is for the proposal to be reviewed by the Academic Affairs and University Policy sub-committee of the University Council.
   - The Academic Affairs and University Policy sub-committee of the University Council sends its recommendations to the University Council for a vote.
   - Approval by the University Council places the proposal on the next available President’s Cabinet agenda.
   - The proposal is reviewed and approved by the President’s Cabinet.
   - The proposal is forwarded to the Board of Visitors agenda for final internal approval.

3. **Obtaining external formal approvals:** The organizational change changing the designation of a school to a college must be approved by SCHEV prior to SACSCOC notification.
   - The final Board of Visitors approved organizational change is prepared by the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.
   - That Office prepares a formal cover letter, signed by the provost for submission to SCHEV.
   - Upon receiving SCHEV approval, that Office sends a letter of notification to SACSCOC.
   - Once that Office receives confirmation of the notification, a date for implementation of the designation change is set.

Forms

Template forms under revision.
Related Documents

Related documents are critical to the development of corresponding policies and procedures. Related documents include federal regulations, state regulations, state policies and VCU policies, procedures and guidelines.

1. State Council for Higher Education in Virginia Policy, Organizational Changes at Public Institutions: Policies and Procedures for Internal and Off-Campus Organizational Changes

2. Curriculum Handbook under revision.

Revision History

None – New Policy

FAQ

1. Question: Who can initiate a change in unit designation?

   Answer: No person below the administrative title of Dean or equivalent as delineated in this policy, may initiate a designation change for an academic unit.