

Faculty Roster Compliance Do's & Don'ts

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Why does it matter? One of the more rigorous SACSCOC requirements for institutional accreditation is that every instructor be competent and well-qualified for each of the courses he/she is assigned to teach. Teaching a university course that is outside of one's academic degree preparation and that is not adequately justified with alternate and compelling evidence of the instructor's competence and expertise in the content of that course is grounds for a finding of noncompliance with accreditation standards. Given the large number of teaching assignments fulfilled by instructors in a given semester or academic year and the variability of academic and experiential preparation of instructors of record, it is not surprising that SACSCOC review committees find evidence of noncompliance more often in the Faculty Rosters required for satisfying CS 3.7.1 Faculty Competence than in any of the other accreditation requirements. When that occurs, committees issue recommendations to institutions that necessitate follow-up and corrective actions to achieve compliance, and additional institutional reports and reviews are required. **Do: Avoid negative consequences in accreditation reviews by adhering to SACSCOC Faculty Credentials Guidelines for appropriately matching each instructor's credentials and qualifications to his/her teaching assignments and by providing sufficient and compelling evidence on the Commission's Faculty Roster Forms to justify all teaching assignments.**

What are the SACSCOC Faculty Credentials Guidelines? A copy of the Faculty Credentials Guidelines accompanies this guidance. The primary emphasis in it is on the possession of appropriate graduate degrees in the teaching discipline that match the discipline of one's teaching assignments. Unfortunately, the term, "teaching discipline" is not defined, nor are expectations clearly stated for the strength of justifications needed when exceptions are made to the academic degree qualifications listed in (a) through (f). **Do: Familiarize yourself with the academic degree preparation requirements in the Faculty Credentials Guidelines, especially (c), (d), (e), and (f), and note the other kinds of evidence listed in Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 that can also be used as other qualifications when appropriate academic degrees are not possessed by the instructor of record. Don't: Fail to recognize in the Guidelines the higher minimum standard for teaching graduate courses than for teaching undergraduate courses. Don't: Assume that the lack of a master's (for undergraduate instruction) or doctoral/terminal degree (for graduate instruction) in the teaching discipline can be ignored by not citing any offsetting other qualifications or be rationalized by merely citing minimal or unremarkable amounts of experience and achievements.**

Will SACSCOC Instructions for Completing the Faculty Roster Provide Further Clarification on Expectations Beyond the Guidelines? Yes, definitely. A copy of those

Faculty Roster Instructions accompanies this guidance. Some clarification as to how to define the term, teaching discipline, is provided, and the strength of justifications is referenced. **Do: Note that when justifications require qualifications other than academic degrees, evidence of competence in the content of the course taught should be strong, if not exceptional.** Combining academic degrees and graduate credits with other evidence of competence is encouraged. The sample of a completed Faculty Roster Form provided here contains concrete examples of how courses taught should be justified with a combination of academic credentials and other evidence of course-related competence. Unfortunately, a justification for teaching a graduate course is not included in the sample. **Do: Familiarize yourself with the instructions for completing the Faculty Roster Form, and examine in depth the contents of the completed sample Form to better understand the expectations for producing compelling justifications of compliance.** Key elements of compliance reflected in the sample Faculty Roster Form are covered next.

So, if holding appropriate graduate degrees in academic disciplines that match the disciplines of the courses taught is the primary concern of SACSCOC evaluators, how should we document that on the Faculty Roster Form, and when should we add other evidence of competence to justify all teaching assignments? Here are several tips for documenting acceptable faculty qualifications on the Faculty Roster Form:

1. **Do: Whenever undergraduate transferable (UT) courses are taught in a specific academic discipline, be sure the instructor has at least a master's degree in that same academic discipline. If not, be sure the instructor has at least a master's degree (any field) and 18 graduate semester hours of credit earned in the same academic discipline of the courses taught. If not, show any degrees and related credits earned and be sure that strong and substantial evidence of competence in the academic discipline/content of the courses taught is provided under Other Qualifications.** Note in the sample Form that Jose Alvarez taught UT accounting courses. Even though, the courses taught had a "Business" discipline label and his MBA was in General Business (a closely related degree), accounting is the specific discipline of concern for SACSCOC evaluators in the courses he taught. Consequently, since his graduate degree was not in accounting, it was important to list his 3 graduate course titles and 9 semester hours earned in accounting, his BBA in accounting, and the strong evidence of professional competence in accounting represented by his current CPA license and his 10 years of accounting experience with a Big Four Accounting firm (that should have been named).
2. **Don't: Assume that citing a "related" graduate degree is sufficient and needs no explanation as to why it is related, leaving relevant graduate semester credits out of the presentation and the Other Qualifications/Comments column blank.** Failure to provide sufficient explanations of degree relevance and to provide other evidence of an instructor's competence to teach the content of specific courses are the

most frequent causes for findings of noncompliance in CS 3.7.1 by peer evaluators. **Do: Whenever there is not an obvious and clear match between the academic area of courses taught and the academic area of the instructor's advanced degrees, ensure that comments explaining the relatedness of the instructor's academic preparation are provided, listings of relevant graduate courses completed are included, and other qualifications are cited as needed to present a strong justification.**

3. **Do: Match the content of each course taught with citations of adequate qualifications of the instructor to teach that content.** The content of the course as reflected in the course title and course description should be the focus of reported faculty qualifications. The content of the course trumps the discipline listing of the course in terms of importance in that regard, because the content of the course is not always represented well by its discipline listing, and some discipline listings of courses do not have matching disciplinary degrees in academe. A course such as a Freshman Experience Seminar does not require its instructors to have degrees from any particular discipline, but does require familiarity with higher education, the institution, and its resources as well as in-service training in the freshman experience and related skill sets and strategies for achieving student success in the transition to college life.
4. **Do: Note that when a total of earned graduate semester hours in a particular academic discipline in question is reported, it should be a precise number and include a listing of the course titles making up that total.** The sample of the completed Faculty Roster Form shows this expectation. **Do: It is better to list the titles of too few courses than to appear to pad the listing with courses that do not add value to the argument that the instructor is well-qualified for his/her teaching assignments. Add explanatory comments to the justification if some course titles do not appear related or are ambiguous.**
5. **Do: Whenever courses are taught across more than one academic discipline, be sure the minimum qualifications for teaching in each of those specific disciplines are met.** Note in the sample Form that Yolanda Bing taught UT courses in three different academic disciplines: history, geography, and kinesiology—Karate. Her MA in history was a sufficient qualification for teaching UT history courses. Her master's degree along with 18 graduate semester hours in geography was sufficient for teaching UT courses in geography. But she had no relevant academic qualifications in Karate, so her black belt in Karate and her first alternate position to the US Olympic team in Karate represented strong evidence of her competence in Karate under Other Qualifications. Lesser accomplishments and achievements in Karate would have required the presentation of more detailed evidence of competence. Caution—even when an appropriate graduate degree is present, there are instances where peer evaluators will be looking for evidence of disciplinary specializations that match the specialized content of the course (more on that below).

6. **Don't: Be too terse or too general when describing Other Qualifications. Do: Offset the absence of expected minimal academic degree/coursework qualifications with strong and specific arguments under Other Qualifications as to why the instructor is qualified and competent to teach his/her assigned courses.** Note in the sample Form that Steig Cederholm taught a UT applied music course with only a bachelor's degree in music. What makes his case justified is the strong and specific evidence of other qualifications. It helps that his bachelor's degree in music performance (BM) was in music composition which matched the undergraduate music composition content of the course he taught, but he lacked the expected advanced degree/graduate study in music composition. The offsetting other evidence of post-baccalaureate competence in music composition was strong: he is a published music composer with four produced symphonies and an opera; he has had public performances of his compositions; and he has music composition experience with a major symphony in Atlanta and a major opera in Houston. If the only evidence cited under Other Qualifications had been stated, "he had substantial professional experience in the field," without being more specific about the kinds and lengths of experience, levels of achievement, and organizations with which he worked, the justification would have been much less persuasive and would have constituted an assertion of music composition competence that was undocumented and lacking in substance (i.e., insufficient).
7. **Do: Whenever graduate (G) courses are taught in a specific academic discipline, be sure the instructor has at least an earned doctorate or terminal degree in that same academic discipline (explaining why a particular terminal degree from another discipline is "related"). If not, be sure the instructor has at least a master's degree in the same academic discipline and additional strong evidence of advanced levels of competence to offset that lack of a terminal degree. Strong evidence would include post-master's/doctoral graduate semester hours of credit earned in the same academic discipline of the courses taught; evidence of research and scholarship accomplishments in the discipline; publications and presentations; extensive related professional experience; advanced licenses and certifications; awards or recognition reflecting the competence in question; etc.** Here and in the Guidelines, the minimum faculty qualifications for graduate course instruction are not the same, but are higher than the minimums for undergraduate instruction (i.e., 18 graduate semester hours alone with any master's degree are not sufficient for graduate instruction). **Don't: Fail to identify strong evidence of advanced levels of competence in the discipline area in question when the instructor of a graduate course does not have a doctorate or terminal degree in the discipline. Don't: Assume that a master's degree in the field or 18 graduate hours earned in the field qualifies an instructor to teach courses for graduate credit without other compelling qualifications.**

8. **Do: Whenever doctoral dissertation supervision is listed as a teaching assignment, ensure that the instructor of record has a doctoral degree in the same or a related academic field. If the supervisor is not in the same or a related field, explain the appropriateness of the relationship of the supervisor's disciplinary expertise and research achievements to the supervised doctoral candidate's dissertation research. If the supervisor does not have an earned doctorate, ensure that the supervisor has an exceptionally strong track record of professional and research achievements in the field and substantial success in supervising doctoral dissertations—report those under Other Qualifications.** The key point here is that a doctoral dissertation supervisor should have sufficient disciplinary expertise and research accomplishments to properly guide and evaluate the dissertation research of the doctoral students under his/her supervision.

9. **Do: Include in the Other Qualifications/Comments column a description of the faculty supervision, in-service training, and periodic evaluations that graduate teaching assistants who are instructors of record are expected to receive when they do not have the requisite master's degree. List the graduate courses completed in the discipline in question toward the 18 or more semester hour guideline.** Ensure that the graduate courses listed are in the same discipline/content area of the courses taught—**Don't: Pad the list.**

10. **Do: Whenever undergraduate courses that are not transferable (UN, usually career courses; or learning support--D for developmental) are taught in a specific academic discipline, be sure the instructor of record has at least a bachelor's degree with a major in that same academic discipline. Exceptions should be well-justified with compelling other qualifications.**

Within some academic disciplines, SACSCOC peer evaluators will often or sometimes question the competency of an instructor to teach a course in a particular specialty area, even if his/her graduate degrees are in an appropriate field of study. Justifications should anticipate those possible challenges and be formed accordingly as follows:

- a. **Do: When courses in the arts and sciences disciplines (e.g., mathematics) are taught by an instructor with a related education degree (e.g., MEd) in the teaching field (e.g., mathematics education), ensure that the instructor has sufficient earned graduate semester hours in the discipline of instruction (i.e., mathematics in this example). List the course titles that make up the 18 or more earned graduate semester hours in the discipline in question.**

- b. **Do: When courses in one of the business disciplines (e.g., marketing) are taught by instructors with a degree in general business (e.g., an MBA), ensure that the instructor has sufficient earned graduate semester hours in the discipline of instruction (i.e., marketing in this example). List the course titles**

that make up the 18 or more earned graduate semester hours in the discipline in question.

- c. **Do: Align teaching assignments in the mass communication specialty areas of print journalism, broadcast journalism, organizational communications or public relations with instructors who have credentials in those areas of mass communications. Teaching assignments in the specialty area of speech communications/performance should be aligned with instructors who have credentials in speech performance. Don't: Assign faculty with degrees in speech to teach mass communications courses (especially print journalism), unless they have other sufficient qualifications in the mass communication field in question.** Just because speech and mass communications specialists may be in the same department, does not mean that they should be teaching each other's courses unless they are qualified to do so. **Do: Note that the same admonition applies to sociologists and social workers, sociologists and anthropologists, political scientists and public administration specialists, economists and finance specialists, marketing and management specialists, various education specialists, various engineering specialists, astronomers and physicists, etc.**

- d. **Do: Ensure that courses in specific art studios and applied music instruments are taught by instructors well-qualified in those studios and instruments.** MFA and MM degrees sometimes do not list the studio or instrument specializations that should be identified on the Faculty Roster for visual confirmation of their match to the studio and applied music courses taught. **Do: Identify those studio and instrument specializations in the Comment column, if they do not appear in the Degrees.**

- e. **Do: Ensure that instructors of human anatomy and physiology are well-qualified to teach courses in that area.** While such courses are typically listed in the discipline of biology, many biologists are not academically prepared or well-qualified in the study of human anatomy & physiology. **Do: Be specific about A&P qualifications in the Comment column.**

What should be done if we discover that there is not sufficient evidence to justify one or more of an instructor's teaching assignments? Corrective action should be taken to ensure compliance with the SACSCOC accreditation standard. **Do: Inform the instructor in writing that he/she will not be assigned to teach those courses in the future until sufficient qualifications are secured; copy the department chair, dean and provost; and attach a copy of that notice to the Faculty Roster Form as evidence of corrective action taken. Do: Avoid being out of compliance before the semester begins by ensuring that teaching assignments are made only after taking expected faculty qualifications into account in compliance with SACSCOC accreditation standards and guidelines.**