



Guidance on Writing Instructor Justifications

Office of Vice Provost for Faculty
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Introduction

Teaching justifications are a critical component of the SACSCOC accreditation process, ensuring that every instructor of record is appropriately qualified for each course they teach. This guidance document outlines the standards and best practices for preparing comprehensive teaching justifications. Justifications should be prepared by the Department Chair, Associate Chair for Academics, or the applicable Faculty Degree Program Coordinator. To demonstrate that faculty possess the necessary subject matter expertise, it is essential to identify the instructor, the course prefix and number, the course title, the instructor's academic degrees and disciplines, relevant graduate coursework, and any credentialing gap that requires explanation. Justifications should then reference relevant alternative qualifications, such as research accomplishments, professional experience, specialized training, licensure or certification, technical competencies, publications, grants, portfolio pieces, or other significant products. All cited credentials and experience must directly relate to the course's learning outcomes and major syllabus topics. The guidance that follows will help you craft justifications that clearly document instructor qualifications, typically spanning several detailed paragraphs, to support institutional compliance and uphold academic standards.

SACSCOC Requirements

Georgia Tech is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). According to Standard 6.2.a, each educational program must provide justification and documentation for the qualifications of its faculty members. During the institution's ten-year review, a Faculty Roster Form must be completed for every course offered over two consecutive semesters. The form lists each instructor and their academic credentials, specifically degrees and fields, to demonstrate their suitability to teach those courses. Instructors must have at least a relevant Master's degree or at least 18 Master's-level credit hours in the teaching discipline to teach undergraduate classes, and a relevant terminal degree is necessary for teaching graduate-level courses. In addition to submitting the Faculty Roster Form, institutions must maintain supporting records, such as official transcripts, CVs or resumes, licenses, certifications, publications, portfolio pieces, or other documentation that substantiates the claimed expertise and is easily accessible during SACSCOC accreditation visits.

How to Write Instructor Justifications for Accreditation

When an instructor's highest academic degree does not formally align with a course's subject area, or when the instructor does not otherwise meet the standard credentialing expectation, a comprehensive justification must be prepared to support the appointment. The justification should begin by clearly identifying the instructor's name, the course prefix and number, the course title, the instructor's degree(s), the discipline of each degree, and the specific credentialing gap being addressed. For example, the justification should state whether the degree is outside the teaching discipline, whether the instructor lacks 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline, or whether the instructor lacks the expected terminal degree for graduate instruction. The justification should then document the individual's alternative qualifications, with special emphasis on relevant workplace experience, research activities, professional achievements, specialized training, licensure and certifications, technical competencies, and other substantive expertise. Such evidence may include leadership roles in industry, participation in significant projects, authorship of technical reports or patents, professional society or industry board service, portfolio pieces, and contributions to innovation within the discipline. The aim is to demonstrate that, despite the absence of the expected formal credential in the teaching discipline, the instructor possesses documented preparation and expertise sufficient to deliver course content effectively at the appropriate academic level.

When educational credentials are not the primary evidence of qualification, it is essential to provide a clear, detailed account of the instructor's work history, research accomplishments, professional experience, and documented competencies. Examples include leading research teams, managing laboratories, developing industry standards, completing specialized training, holding industry-recognized licenses or certifications, founding organizations relevant to the course subject, or serving as a subject matter expert for professional or industry groups. Prior teaching experience alone does not satisfy credentialing requirements because it demonstrates pedagogical skill rather than subject matter expertise. Prior teaching experience may supplement the justification when it demonstrates subject-matter instruction, but it should not be used as the primary evidence of qualification. Instead, the justification should highlight technical proficiency and disciplinary expertise, documented through substantive outputs such as peer-reviewed publications, successful grant applications, notable products, portfolio pieces, certification records, or recognized contributions to the discipline or field.

The justification must clearly articulate the instructor's disciplinary or substantive expertise in a specific, verifiable way. This can be done by describing the scope and impact of their work, detailing their involvement in relevant projects, and citing tangible outputs that demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. Claims of expertise should be supported by appropriate documentation, such as transcripts, a CV or resume, licenses, certifications, publications, portfolio pieces, or other records that substantiate the instructor's preparation. By providing concrete examples and documentation, Tech validates the instructor's qualifications and ensures alignment with accreditation standards.

For example, an individual with a Master's degree in Engineering may be justified in teaching advanced graduate courses in exceptional cases where substantial, discipline-specific expertise is clearly documented, such as when they have conducted extensive research in the relevant field, managed national research laboratories, or founded successful technology companies. Additional evidence, such as awarded grants, published peer-reviewed articles, and participation in professional societies, should be included to further establish their subject matter expertise. These accomplishments should be directly relevant to the course content, demonstrating the instructor's ability to provide students with both theoretical and practical perspectives.

A critical part of the justification process is ensuring that all cited qualifications and experiences are explicitly linked to the learning outcomes and major syllabus topics for the specific course. The justification should demonstrate how the instructor's documented expertise supports the course objectives, core content, and student learning. This may include linking professional accomplishments, research, technical competencies, certifications, or portfolio evidence to the key skills, knowledge areas, and syllabus topics students are expected to master. By aligning the instructor's background with the intended learning outcomes and course content, the Institute provides clear evidence that students will receive high-quality instruction from a qualified expert, thereby supporting academic rigor and compliance with accreditation standards.

A strong justification typically follows three steps: first, clearly state the credentialing gap; second, describe the instructor's documented expertise, including academic preparation, professional experience, scholarly or creative work, technical competencies, licensure, certifications, or other relevant evidence; and third, explain how that expertise directly supports the assigned course's learning outcomes, major syllabus topics, and the expected level of instruction.

Example Justification for an Instructor Without a Terminal Degree

The following example demonstrates how to justify an instructor who does not hold the expected terminal degree for graduate instruction but has documented, discipline-specific expertise that supports the assigned course. The example should identify the credentialing gap, describe the instructor's relevant qualifications, and connect those qualifications to the course learning outcomes and major syllabus topics for BMED 6507, Fundamentals of Medical Device Regulatory Process.

1. Understand US FDA structure and International Regulatory Affairs processes, including Class II, Class III, and Tech File submission formats and requirements;
2. Prepare a 510(k) US regulatory submission from start to finish;
3. Prepare an IRB packet from start to finish;
4. Construct regulatory strategy (company and regulatory body);
5. Review product development SOP's that are compliant with FDA QSR and ISO 13485;
6. Be able to apply the above knowledge to the MBID Master's projects.

XXX holds an engineering degree from Georgia Tech but does not possess the expected terminal degree for graduate instruction in the teaching discipline. This justification is therefore based on XXX's documented professional preparation and more than 20 years of discipline-specific experience in the medical device industry. XXX's qualifications are directly relevant to BMED 6507, Fundamentals of Medical Device Regulatory Process, which prepares students to understand regulatory frameworks, prepare regulatory and IRB submissions, develop regulatory strategies, review compliant product development procedures, and apply regulatory knowledge to MBID Master's projects.

XXX's professional expertise includes extensive work with the structure and requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and with international regulatory affairs processes, including Class II, Class III, and Technical File submission formats and requirements. This experience directly supports the course's emphasis on regulatory structures and submission pathways and enables XXX to teach students how these systems operate in practice, including the expectations and documentation requirements associated with different device classifications and regulatory bodies. This addresses Learning Outcome 1.

XXX has prepared and overseen numerous 510(k) submissions for both start-up companies and large corporations, guiding projects from initial regulatory planning through review and approval. This documented experience aligns with the course outcome that requires students to prepare a 510(k) U.S. regulatory submission from start to finish. Drawing on real submission processes, XXX can help students assemble the required components, anticipate regulatory expectations, and manage a complete submission in a professional context. This addresses Learning Outcome 2.

XXX's background also includes drafting and submitting Institutional Review Board packets for clinical studies, reflecting substantial knowledge of ethical requirements and regulatory obligations. This experience supports the course outcome of preparing an IRB packet from start to finish and is directly connected to major syllabus topics in clinical research oversight, human subjects protections, and compliance documentation. This addresses Learning Outcome 3.

In addition, XXX has developed and implemented regulatory strategies for medical device companies of varying sizes, including those requiring coordination with regulatory authorities and alignment with company goals, product development timelines, and compliance obligations. This experience directly supports the course outcome that requires students to construct regulatory strategies for both companies and regulatory bodies and provides students with practical examples of how regulatory pathways are developed and adjusted in industry settings. This addresses Learning Outcome 4.

XXX's documented experience with quality systems, including the development and review of standard operating procedures compliant with the FDA Quality System Regulation and ISO 13485, further supports the course's focus on product development procedures and regulatory compliance. This expertise aligns with the learning outcome requiring students to review product development SOPs and provides substantive preparation for teaching the course's major topics in quality systems, compliance processes, and medical device product development. This addresses Learning Outcome 5.

Finally, XXX's professional experience directly supports the course outcome that requires students to apply regulatory knowledge to MBID Master's projects. Through case-based examples, project mentoring, and applied regulatory analysis, XXX can help students connect course concepts to real-world challenges in medical device development. This addresses Learning Outcome 6.

Taken together, XXX's engineering preparation, extensive medical device regulatory experience, documented work on submissions and IRB materials, regulatory strategy development, and quality systems expertise demonstrate subject matter expertise sufficient to support graduate-level instruction in BMED 6507. Supporting documentation should include XXX's CV or resume, transcript, and any relevant records of regulatory submissions, certifications, professional training, publications, portfolio materials, or other documentation substantiating the qualifications described above.

Example Justification for an Instructor With a Terminal Degree in a Different Field

Professor YYY holds a terminal degree in engineering rather than in building construction. This justification is therefore based on the alignment between Professor YYY's documented engineering preparation, discipline-specific expertise in structural analysis and mechanics of materials, and the learning outcomes and major syllabus topics of BC 3640, Construction Mechanics.

Professor YYY's academic preparation includes advanced study and applied work in structural analysis, building performance, and the behavior of structural systems under load. This expertise directly supports the course's focus on how buildings resist, absorb, and transmit forces and prepares students to evaluate structural system performance in construction contexts. This addresses Learning Outcome 1.

Professor YYY's experience testing construction materials and analyzing material properties provides documented preparation for teaching students to evaluate and select appropriate materials for specific construction applications. This background supports major syllabus topics on material behavior, durability, safety, and performance in the built environment. This addresses Learning Outcome 2.

Professor YYY's engineering expertise in mechanics of materials also supports instruction on how structural members respond to applied loads. Drawing on documented experience with analytical methods, structural behavior, and real-world engineering applications, Professor YYY can help students assess load-resisting members, interpret structural performance, and connect engineering principles to construction mechanics. This addresses Learning Outcome 3. Taken together, Professor YYY's terminal degree in engineering, advanced preparation in structural analysis, documented experience with construction materials, and expertise in mechanics of materials provide evidence of subject matter expertise sufficient to support instruction in BC 3640. Supporting documentation should include Professor YYY's transcript, CV or resume, and any relevant records of research, projects, publications, professional experience, or other materials substantiating the qualifications described above.

Teaching Justification Letter Template

The template that follows is provided as a resource units may use when preparing teaching justification letters. Use of the template is not required, but it is encouraged because it helps ensure that all necessary information is addressed consistently and thoroughly.

[USE UNIT LETTERHEAD]

[Date]

To: Vice Provost for Faculty
From: [Name, Title]
School/Unit: [Department or School Name]
Subject: Justification of Qualifications for [Instructor Name] to Teach [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]

Instructor and Course Information

- Instructor name: [Instructor Name]
- Degree(s) held: [Degree(s), Institution(s), and Year(s)]
- Discipline of degree(s): [Discipline(s) of Degree(s)]
- Course assigned: [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]

This letter documents and justifies the qualifications of [Instructor Name] to teach [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]. The credentialing gap requiring justification is that [briefly state the gap, such as (include all that apply): the instructor's degree is outside the teaching discipline (or CIP code); the instructor does not have 18 graduate credit hours in the teaching discipline (or CIP code); or the instructor does not hold the expected terminal degree for graduate instruction]. This justification is based on the instructor's documented academic preparation, professional experience, scholarly or creative work, technical competencies, licensure, certifications, and/or other evidence of subject matter expertise directly related to the course.

Documented Expertise

[Instructor Name] has documented expertise that is directly relevant to [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]. This expertise includes [summarize the instructor's relevant academic preparation, graduate coursework, professional experience, research or creative activity, specialized training, technical competencies, licensure, certifications, publications, portfolio pieces, industry or professional service, or other substantive evidence].

- Professional or disciplinary experience: [Describe relevant roles, responsibilities, projects, leadership, applied work, industry experience, clinical experience, laboratory work, design work, consulting, or other experience that demonstrates subject matter expertise]
- Scholarly, creative, technical, or professional evidence: [List publications, grants, patents, technical reports, portfolio pieces, products, performances, exhibitions, professional standards, certifications, licenses, specialized training, or other evidence that substantiates expertise]

- Supporting documentation: [Identify attached documentation, such as transcript, CV or resume, license, certification record, publication list, portfolio materials, evidence of professional training, or other records that substantiate the qualifications described above]
- Teaching experience, if relevant: [If applicable, describe prior teaching experience only as supplemental evidence, emphasizing how it reflects subject matter instruction rather than using it as the primary basis for qualification]

Course Alignment

The qualifications described above align with the learning outcomes, major syllabus topics, core content, and expected level of instruction for [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]. Specifically, [explain how the instructor's documented expertise prepares them to teach the course content and support student learning].

[For each relevant learning outcome, add one or more sentences connecting the instructor's evidence to the outcome. Use the following format as needed:

- Learning Outcome [#]: This [evidence/expertise/experience] supports students' ability to [insert learning outcome or syllabus topic] by [add detail here].

Taken together, [Instructor Name]'s documented preparation and expertise provide evidence of subject matter expertise sufficient to support instruction in [Course Prefix, Number, and Title]. The attached documentation substantiates the qualifications described above and supports the instructor's assignment as instructor of record for this course.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

[Title: Chair, Associate Chair, or Faculty Degree Program Coordinator]