

Distance Education Policy

Definition

The U.S. Department of Education defines Distance Education as:

Distance education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include--

- (1) The internet;
- (2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- (3) Audio conferencing; or
- (4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

Evaluation of Distance Education

NWCCU practice requires that an institution's distance education programming be reviewed as part of its comprehensive evaluation. Evaluators who visit an institution that offers distance education are encouraged to review the "C-RAC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-Line Learning)".

In keeping with federal requirements, evaluators who visit an institution that offers distance education programs are asked to verify that the institution: (1) has in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit; (2) makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy; and (3) notifies students at the time of registration and enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification procedures. Through its review of the institution's distance education programs, the Commission seeks assurance that these programs fulfill the Standards for Accreditation; specifically that:

- Distance education programs are consistent with the mission and educational objectives of the institution.
- Distance education programs are integrated into the regular planning processes of the institution.
- The institution provides sufficient resources – financial, human, physical, technological – to support its distance education programs.
- Operation of distance education programming is incorporated into the governance system of the institution.
- The institution's academic unit exercises oversight of distance education programs, ensuring both the rigor of the program and the quality of instruction.
- Courses and programs offered via distance education maintain the same academic standards as those offered on the main campus.
- On-campus faculty have a substantive role in the design and implementation of distance education programs.
- The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of each distance education program, including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction, to ensure comparability to campus-based programs.
- Students enrolled in distance education programs have adequate access to and make effective use of learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories and equipment.
- Students enrolled in distance education programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, academic advising, course registration, and career and placement counseling.

- Publications and advertising for distance education programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as the program's goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty.
- Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of distance education programs. Where the institution has entered into contractual relationships involving credits and degrees, it has obtained Commission approval for the substantive change.

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