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ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education

January 2024

The Commission holds the same high expectations for quality, integrity, and effectiveness for distance education and correspondence education as in traditional modes of instruction. The Accreditation Standards require that all learning opportunities provided by accredited institutions must have equivalent quality, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, regardless of mode of delivery. This policy provides a framework that allows institutions the flexibility to adapt their delivery modes to the emerging needs of students and society while maintaining quality and promoting equitable outcomes. Any institution offering courses and programs through distance education or correspondence education is expected to meet the requirements of accreditation in each of its courses and programs and at each of its sites. This policy reflects the federal regulatory requirements regarding distance education and correspondence education in accordance with the following definitions.

Definition of Distance Education (34 C.F.R. § 600.2.)

Distance Education means:

(1) Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs 2(a) through (d) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor(s) and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor(s), either synchronously or asynchronously.

(2) The technologies may include:
   a) the internet;
   b) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
   c) audioconferencing; or
   d) other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (a) through (c).

(3) For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.

(4) For purposes of this definition, substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following—
   a) Providing direct instruction;
   b) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;

c) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;

d) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or

e) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(5) An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency—

a) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and

b) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Definition of Correspondence Education (34 C.F.R. § 602.3.)

Correspondence education means:

(1) education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor.

(2) interaction between the instructor(s) and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.

(3) If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course to be a correspondence course.

(4) correspondence education is not distance education.

Policy Elements

- Development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education, must take place within the institution’s total educational mission (Standard 2.1).
- Institutions are expected to control development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs offered in their names, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education (Standard 2.2, 2.6).
- Institutions are expected to have clearly defined and appropriate student learning outcomes for all courses and programs, including those delivered through distance education or correspondence education (Standard 2.2).
- Institutions are expected to provide the resources and structure needed to accomplish these outcomes and to demonstrate that their students achieve these outcomes through application of appropriate assessment (Standards 1.4, 2.9, 3.9).

- Institutions are expected to provide the Commission advance notice of intent to offer a program, degree or certificate in which 50% or more of the courses are via distance education or correspondence education, through the substantive change process. For purposes of this requirement, the institution is responsible for calculating the percentage of courses that may be offered through distance or correspondence education *(Policy on Substantive Change)*.
- Institutions must have processes in place establishing that a student who registers in any course offered via distance education or correspondence is the same student who academically engages in the course or program.[1] [Required documentation for Standard 2]
- The institution must also publish policies that ensure the protection of student privacy and will notify students at the time of class registration of any charges associated with verification of student identity.[2] [Required documentation for Standard 2]

Adopted June 2001; Edited August 2004; Revised June 2005, January 2010, June 2011; Edited August 2012; Revised June 2021; Edited January 2024.

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[1] 34 C.F.R. § 602.17(g)
[2] 34 C.F.R. § 602.17(h)