New England Commission of Higher Education
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Guidelines for Preparing Substantive Change Reports on the Establishment of Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education

These guidelines are provided to assist institutions preparing substantive change reports regarding their distance education activities for consideration by the New England Commission of Higher Education as required by its Policy on the Review of Distance Education.*

Purpose
The purpose of substantive change report/proposal is to provide the Commission sufficient information to perform a review of a member institution's plans to undertake distance education activities. Such reviews must occur before the new activities can be encompassed within the institution's accreditation.

In keeping with the policy statement mentioned above, a substantive change proposal is required of affiliated institutions which plan to offer (1) Title IV-eligible certificate or degree programs for which students can earn 50% or more of the credits through technologically mediated instruction and/or (2) degree completion programs offered online. A different approval process is followed for institutions whose distance education offerings do not meet these criteria.

Content
The proposal should present ample evidence that the institution's plans to undertake distance education activities fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*. To this end, it should demonstrate that the proposed activities are compatible with the institution's mission; that appropriate planning has occurred; that sufficient resources, technological, human and otherwise, will be brought to bear to assure quality programming; that the institution has designed appropriate mechanisms to assess and improve the quality of its distance education programming and to plan for its future development. Emphasis throughout the report should be on the distinctive characteristics of the electronic delivery system and support utilized to assure its educational effectiveness other than institutional elements integral to any academic programming, and on the institution's plans to ensure that certificates and degrees delivered predominantly or entirely online meet the standards of the institution and of the Commission.

Reports should be about 20 pages single spaced, excluding the data table and any requested appendices. The following items should be included:

* This policy statement, the *Standards for Accreditation,* the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines, as well as other materials cited, are available on the Commission's web site.

1. Cover Page. Include the title *Report on the Establishment of Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education*, institution's name, and submission date.

2. Descriptive Information. This initial section of the report should include the following information:
    a. Name and title of the following individuals:
        - Person with institutional responsibility for the academic quality of distance education programming
        - Person to be contacted with questions (if any) about the content of the report (please include telephone number and email address)
    b. The URL(s), including passwords where necessary, where information about the institution's distance education activities is available and where online services can be accessed by both students (prospective and current) and faculty; include brief descriptors of each as appropriate.
    c. A description of the technical infrastructure designed to support the institution's distance education activities (include bandwidth, details of connectivity, network maintenance and support, course management software including the version of the software, help desk services, and staffing, security, backups, etc.).
    d. A description of the institution's verification procedures (the procedures through which the institution will ensure that the student who registers in a distance education program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the grade).
    e. A list of any consortial partners or contractual relationships that support the institution's distance education activities with a brief explanation of each relationship.

3. Narrative. This section of the report should provide a description and self-evaluation of the institution's planned distance education activity together with a discussion of any longer-term plans regarding its further development including its improvement. Emphasis should be placed on the distinctive characteristics of online instruction and the various resources devoted to its support within the larger institutional context. The narrative should demonstrate that these activities fulfill the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* and the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines. The institution should provide evidence that it is actively and systematically engaged in appraising the educational effectiveness, particularly as measured by student learning, of its online programming and using the results for improvement. The narrative should be organized by Standard:

    1. Mission, Organization, Governance, and Planning: Describe how the proposed online programming is based in the institution's mission. Describe where responsibility for distance education falls within the institutional structure and how the quality and integrity of the proposed program(s) will be assured, with faculty having primary responsibility for curriculum/curricula content and quality assurance. Describe the institution's planning for the proposed program(s), including how the need or market for the program(s) was determined. Describe how the institution's governing board, administration, and faculty were involved in the planning. As appropriate, describe the involvement of external groups, such as advisory groups. Provide information about how the institution will evaluate the

proposed program(s). (*Standards* 1.1, 1.4, 1.12, 1.13, 1.14; *Guidelines* 11, 18, 19, 21)

2. The Academic Program, Faculty, and Students: Provide evidence of the institution's capacity to offer the proposed online program(s) and to maintain its current programs at an acceptable level of quality. Describe the proposed program(s): student learning goals, structure, curriculum, award of credit (including compliance with the Commission's credit hour policy), content, and program review. Provide information about the faculty who will teach in the proposed program(s), including information about their qualifications and the institution's plans to provide needed training in online teaching methods. Describe the student body the institution intends to serve with the proposed program(s) and how students will be recruited and considered for admission. Describe the technical support available to online students and discuss how the institution will provide these students with access to needed support and other relevant student services. Indicate how technology will be used to support regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty, including academic advising. Indicate how the institution will ensure that students studying online are able to achieve learning outcomes comparable to those achieved in on-ground programs. (*Standards* 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.10, 2.16, 2.18, 2.19, 2.20, 2.22, 2.23, 2.24; *Guidelines* 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17; NECHE *Policy on the Review of Distance Education*)

3. Institutional Resources: Provide evidence of the institution's financial capacity to offer the proposed online program(s); include multi-year enrollment projections and revenue and expense budgets, including indirect costs. Describe how physical or digital information and learning resources will be provided, maintained, and assessed regularly to support student learning in the proposed program(s). Describe how data integrity, security, and privacy will be preserved and how disaster recovery and business continuity plans encompass the proposed online program(s). (*Standards* 3.1, 3.2, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12; *Guidelines* 1, 2, 5, 8, 16)

4. Educational Effectiveness and the Success of All Students: Identify the learning outcomes that have been established for the proposed online program(s). Describe the mission-appropriate quantitative and qualitative measures of student success (including retention and graduation rates, and post-enrollment/post-graduation success measures as defined by the institution) that have been identified for the program(s). Discuss how the institution will assess student learning in the program(s) as well as how assessment results will be used for improvement. (Standards 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5; *Guidelines* 11, 12, 13)

5. Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure: Describe how the institution will maintain high ethical standards in its dealings with all constituents, the public, and the Commission with respect to the proposed online program(s). Discuss how the institution will provide accurate, timely, and readily accessible digital and/or physical information about the proposed program(s), including the educational opportunities, learning goals, and support services available, to the public and its internal and external constituencies. If applicable, describe how the institution has secured and will maintain the necessary authority for each jurisdiction in which it

conducts the online program(s); include any official approval documents in an appendix. (*Standards* 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5; also, 2.4; *Guidelines* 8, 20, 22, 23)

Contractual arrangements: If the institution enters into a contractual relationship with an entity not accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to provide services or instruction for the proposed programming, the narrative should conclude with a section that provides evidence that the arrangements comply with the Commission's standards (1.5, 2.13, 5.4, 5.5) and its Policy on Good Practices in Contractual Arrangements involving Courses and Programs). See also *Guideline* 7. Include a copy of the contract as an appendix to the report. (Note: If the above-named policy applies, the institution may require more than 20 pages to complete this report.)

4. Data Table. Include the Distance Education Data Table (available on the Commission's website) as an appendix to your report.

Submission of Report

Institutions should submit plans to offer distance education programming at least six months prior to intended implementation. An electronic copy of the report, including data table and appendices, (single, searchable pdf file) should be submitted to the Commission through the NECHE Institution Portal.

Staff Assistance

The institution is encouraged to consult with Commission staff as it prepares its proposal. The Commission's staff will be glad to answer questions about the nature and content of the institutional report and/or to read a draft of the report.

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