

Policy on the Review of Off-Campus Programming

The New England Commission of Higher Education regards off-campus programming as an integral part of the institution and not peripheral to its objectives or other programs. It encourages and supports institutional efforts to extend higher education opportunities to previously unserved populations, and this policy is not meant to inhibit such activities or to diminish creative approaches to them.

In keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*, off-campus programming should be consistent with the educational objectives of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus; students and faculty should receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs; and students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs, assures adequate resources to maintain quality, and endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered.

In conformity with federal regulations, this policy is applicable to those instructional sites where 50% or more of an academic program is offered or where a degree-completion program is offered either at a Branch Campus or an Additional Instructional Location, as defined below. It is not applicable to short-term, non-credit, community service courses, nor to traditional credit-bearing courses offered on an occasional basis in response to constituency needs or interests. It also does not apply to asynchronous distance learning activities, which are treated under separate policies and procedures. In addition, the Commission has established supplementary policies and procedures for overseas educational programs and instructional locations for non-U.S. nationals.

Any questions about the applicability of this policy to specific institutional off-campus activities should be referred to the President of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

I. Definitions

In keeping with Federal Regulations, Branch Campus and Additional Instructional Location are defined as follows:

Branch Campus

A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus which meets *all* of the following criteria:

- offers 50% or more of an academic program leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized credential, or at which a degree may be completed;
- is permanent in nature;
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization;
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Additional Instructional Location

Any instructional site geographically apart from the main campus where 50% or more of a degree or certificate program is offered or where a degree may be completed, but which otherwise does not meet the definition of a Branch Campus.

II. Accreditation

Newly initiated Branch Campuses will not be automatically included in the institution's accreditation. The procedures outlined below must be completed before a Branch Campus is encompassed within the scope of its accreditation by the Commission.

Institutional activities at Additional Instructional Locations are regularly assessed in keeping with the details outlined under heading *Ongoing Monitoring* below.

In cases when an institution does not have general approval for Additional Instructional Locations (see below), the procedures outlined below must be completed before an Additional Instructional Location is encompassed within the scope of the institution's accreditation by the Commission.

III. Procedures

A. Advance Notice to the Commission

Establishing a Branch Campus or, for institutions without general approval, an Additional Instructional Location represents a substantive change; institutions are referred to the Commission's Policy on Substantive Change. It is the responsibility of an institution to notify the Commission about its intention to establish a Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location before it becomes operational and to provide a substantive change proposal about its plans for the projected activity following the "Guidelines for Preparing Reports on the Establishment of Off-Campus Programming". The proposal should demonstrate that the new Campus or Location will fulfill all the *Standards for Accreditation*, with particular regard to:

- institutional mission;
- institutional planning to establish the new Campus or Location;
- the educational programming to be offered;
- faculty, library, academic technological support, and student services including advising and counseling;
- operation, management, and physical resources at the new Campus or Location including, if appropriate, legal authorization to conduct the activity;
- the institution's fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the new Campus or Location;

- contractual agreements, if any, with non-regionally-accredited organizations which will recruit students and/or provide instruction or otherwise provide academic services in support of the Branch Campus. (An institution establishing a Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location through a contractual relationship should address in its proposal the Commission's statement on "Good Practices in Contractual Arrangements Involving Courses and Programs.")

In addition, the proposal should include multi-year projections for revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the new Campus or Location.

In considering new Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations, the Commission's interest includes the institution's capacity to operate off-campus sites. Capacity is demonstrated through the institution's provision of evidence of a system to ensure quality across a distributed enterprise that includes:

- (a) clearly identified academic control;
- (b) regular evaluation of the locations;
- (c) adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems;
- (d) financial stability; and
- (e) long-range planning for expansion.

An electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) of the proposal should be submitted to the Commission through the NECHE Institution Portal.

B. Commission Review

The institution's proposal will be reviewed by the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting. Should the Commission conclude that the plans for the new Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location appear to fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*, the new site will be approved and encompassed within the institution's accreditation. If approval is withheld, the reasons for doing so and subsequent steps will be specified.

The Commission will specify an effective date for inclusion of the Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location in the institution's accreditation which, in keeping with federal regulation, will not pre-date either an earlier denial of the institution's plans by the Commission or the Commission's formal acceptance of the substantive change proposal.

C. On-Site Evaluation

As soon as practicable, but no later than six months after it becomes operational, the Commission will undertake an on-site visit to the new Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location. The purpose of the visit will be to assess the institution's success in implementing its plans for the new Campus or Location and to otherwise verify that the site has the personnel, facilities and resources as claimed in the substantive change proposal. In addition, the Commission may specify items for particular attention by the site visitor. The "Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit" will be followed in these reviews.

In addition, as noted below in "Ongoing Monitoring," a representative sample of all Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations will be visited during the institution's comprehensive evaluation.

III. Permission for General Approval for Additional Instructional Locations

In certain cases, the Commission may determine that an institution has the capacity to operate Additional Instructional Locations in keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*, without a prior substantive change proposal or six-month on-site evaluation. In such cases, the Commission will grant general approval for the institution to establish such sites. Such general approval is valid for no more than five years and is reviewed at the time of the comprehensive evaluation and interim report.

General approval may be granted to establish sites within the U.S. only or limited by geography (e.g., New England states) or by type of program. Except as indicated below, locations added by institutions with general approval will be automatically included within the institution's accreditation; notification of a new location must be provided to the Commission offices within 30 days of its establishment.

An institution's permission for pre-approved Additional Instructional Locations will be reaffirmed by the Commission during its review of the institution's interim (fifth-year) report and at the time of the comprehensive evaluation.

General approval is not granted for the establishment of international sites.

General approval is not granted for Additional Instructional Locations when the institution meets any of the following criteria:

- has three or fewer Additional Instructional Locations;
- has not demonstrated that it has a proven record of successful oversight of Additional Instructional Locations, as defined above;
- has been accredited for fewer than ten years;
- experiences rapid growth¹ in the number of Additional Instructional Locations;
- has been placed on show-cause or probation or has been subject to a negative action by the Commission over the prior three academic years or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation or candidacy status.
- is under provisional certification with the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV.

An institution that undergoes a change of ownership must reestablish eligibility for general approval of Additional Instructional Locations. Such locations will not automatically be included in the institution's accreditation until the institution has established at least three (additional) sites, been accredited for at least ten years under the new ownership, and has demonstrated its successful oversight of off-campus instructional locations.

IV. Ongoing Monitoring of Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations

Ongoing monitoring takes four forms:

1. Each spring, the institution reports information about all its off-campus programming on its Annual Report Form and uses the definitions included in this Policy to designate each location as either a "branch campus" or an "additional instructional location." Should the Commission be informed by the U.S. Secretary of Education that the designation of an institution's location diverges from that

¹ Given the diversity of institutional circumstances, "rapid growth" is determined by Commission staff as part of its review of the off-campus programming section of the institution's Annual Report.

determined by the Secretary, the Commission will, upon request of the Secretary, conform the designation in its database to that of the Secretary. The Commission will inform the institution of the change.

2. In taking action to review a site visit report of a new Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location, the Commission may specify further monitoring in the form of a progress report or focused evaluation. Typically, such actions will be taken to measure the institution's success in addressing identified concerns specific to a location or locations, when there has been a significant growth in the number of off-campus sites, or where there are concerns as to the institution's capacity to maintain off-campus programming in keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

3. As a part of the interim (fifth-year) report required of all colleges and universities on a ten-year evaluation cycle, the institution is expected to address all off-campus programming. For institutions with general approval for instructional locations, a representative sample of locations added since the last comprehensive evaluation will be visited at the time of the interim (interim) report. (See Procedures for the Review of Off-Campus Sites at the Time of the Interim Report for Institutions with General Approval.)

4. All off-campus programming will be specifically reviewed through the comprehensive evaluation. The institution is expected to appropriately address such off-campus activities in its self-study report. A representative sample of the institution's Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations will be visited as a part of each comprehensive evaluation. Commission staff, in consultation with the institution and the team chair, will review the number, enrollments, and geographic distribution of the institution's off-campus locations and determine an appropriate representative sample. If an institution has two or more off-campus locations, no fewer than two sites will be visited. If an institution has off-campus locations in states other than that of the main campus, at least one out-of-state campus will be visited. If the institution has off-campus locations outside the United States, at least one overseas campus will be visited. (See Procedures for the Review of Off-Campus Sites at the Time of the Interim Report for Institutions with General Approval.)

V. Relocation of Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations

An institution planning to relocate a branch campus or additional instructional location should contact Commission staff to discuss its plans.

This policy supersedes the Commission's prior policy statement, dated 3/7/97, "Policy and Procedures on the Establishment of a Branch Campus."

*March 2000
November 2003
July 2009
April 2010
September 2011
April 2013
Editorial changes March 2014, June 2015
July 2020
Editorial changes March 2021, August 2021
September 2022*