
Guidelines for the Review of Off-Campus and Distance Education Programming during a Comprehensive Evaluation

Commission policy requires that an institution's off-campus programs and distance education programming be reviewed as part of its comprehensive evaluation. This requirement applies to:

- any instructional site other than the main campus at which at least 50 percent of an educational program is offered;
- online and hybrid courses;
- Title IV-eligible certificate programs and degree programs for which students may earn 50 percent or more of the credits for the program through technologically mediated instruction; and
- degree completion programs offered on-line.

The institution is expected to appropriately address its off-campus activities and distance education programming in its self-study.

A representative sample of the institution's branch campuses and additional instructional locations will be visited as a part of each comprehensive evaluation. Arrangements for the review of off-campus sites and distance education programming should be made during the chair's preliminary visit to the campus. Visits to off-campus sites can take place during the comprehensive visit or at other times, depending upon the location and number of sites to be visited. It is preferable to complete visits to off-campus sites before or during the comprehensive visit. Evaluators will want an opportunity to speak with faculty and students at the site, as well as to review the resources available at the site. It will also be important for evaluators to assess the capacity of the institution to administer its off-campus sites and distance education programs.

Commission's 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.

Evaluators who visit an institution that offers distance education are encouraged to review the Policy on the Review of Distance Education and the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines (both available on the NECHE website).

In keeping with federal requirements, evaluators who visit an institution that offers distance education courses and 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 off-campus and distance education programming, the Commission seeks assurance that this programming fulfills the *Standards for Accreditation*; specifically that:

- Off-campus and distance education programming is consistent with the mission and educational objectives of the institution.
- Planning for off-campus and distance education programming is integrated into the regular planning processes of the institution.
- Operation of off-campus and distance education programming is incorporated into the governance system of the institution.
- The institution's academic unit exercises oversight of off-campus and distance education programming, ensuring both the rigor of the programming and the quality of instruction.
- Courses and programs offered at off-campus locations and via distance education maintain the same academic standards as those offered on the main campus.
- Students enrolled at off-campus sites or in distance education courses or programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, academic advising, course registration, and career and placement counseling.
- The institution provides sufficient resources – financial, human, physical, and technological – to support its off-campus and distance education programming.
- Students enrolled at off-campus sites or in distance education courses or programs have adequate access to and make effective use of learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories, and equipment.
- The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its off-campus and distance education programming, including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction, to ensure comparability to campus-based programs.
- Publications and advertising for off-campus and distance education programming 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 off-campus and distance education programming. Such arrangements are periodically reviewed, and the written agreements provide for appropriate exit strategies to protect students, should the arrangement be terminated. Where the institution has entered into contractual relationships involving credits and degrees, it has obtained Commission approval for the substantive change per the eponymous policy.

August 26, 2004

July, 2009

Editorial changes July 2016, August 2021, May 2023