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 Electronically Offered Degree Programs.[*]

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Commission sufficient information to perform a paper 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, the report is required of affiliated institutions which offer, or 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 on-line. It is not applicable to on-line courses offered outside the context of a predominantly on-line degree or certificate program, nor technologically mediated instruction provided to campus-based students.

Content

The report 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

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[*] This policy statement, the *Standards for Accreditation,* the C-RAC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-Line Learning), as well as other materials cited, are available on the Commission's web site: https://neche.org

the institution's plans to ensure that certificates and degrees delivered predominantly or entirely on-line meet the standards of the institution and of the Commission.

Reports should not exceed 20 pages single spaced, excluding the data sheets. The following items should be included:

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

2. <u>Descriptive Information</u>. 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 <u>academic quality</u> 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 on-line 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. <u>Narrative</u>. 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 on-line 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 C-RAC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning). 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 on-line programming and using the results for improvement. The narrative should be organized by Standard: emphasis to:

   1. <u>Mission and Purposes</u>: Describe how the proposed programming is based in the institution's mission. (Note *Standards* 1.1, 1.3; *Guideline* #1)

2. <u>Planning and Evaluation</u>: Describe the institution's planning for the proposed programming, including how the need or market for the proposed 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). (Note 2.1, 2.3, 2.6, 2.7; *Guideline #2*)

3. <u>Organization and Governance</u>: Describe where responsibility for distance education falls within the institutional structure and how the quality and integrity of the on-line programming will be assured. (Note 3.1, 3.14, 3.15; *Guideline #3 and #9*)

4. <u>The Academic Program</u>: Describe the proposed on-line program(s): student learning goals, structure, curriculum, award of credit (including compliance with credit hour regulations), and content. Discuss the involvement of faculty in the development of the proposed program(s). Indicate how the programs will use technology to support regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty. Provide evidence of the institution's capacity to offer the new programming and to maintain its current programs at an acceptable level of quality. Indicate how the institution will ensure that students studying at a distance are able to achieve learning outcomes comparable to those achieved in on-ground programs. (Note 4.5, 4.8, 4.34, 4.45-4.48; *Guideline #4, #5, and #9*)

5. <u>Students</u>: Describe the student body the institution intends to serve with the proposed program(s) and how students will be recruited and considered for admission. Include information about the institution's goals for retention and graduation rates for students enrolled in on-line program(s). Describe the technical support available to on-line students and discuss how the institution will provide these students with access to needed support and other student services. (Note 5.1-5.6, 5.8-5.11; *Guideline #7*)

6. <u>Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship</u>: 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 on-line teaching methods. Discuss how students studying at a distance will receive academic advising. (Note 6.2, 6.3, 6.15-6.19; *Guideline #6*)

7. <u>Institutional Resources</u>: Provide evidence of the institution's financial capacity to offer the proposed program(s). Include multi-year enrollment projections and revenue and expense budgets, including indirect costs, for the proposed programming. Discuss how the institution's governing board has considered the financial aspects of the proposed program(s). Describe how the institution will assure that students studying at a distance have access to, and use appropriately, the library and information resources they need to complete their program. Describe how the institution will support students in using information resources. Discuss the institution's plans to assure the sufficiency of its information technology to support its on-line programs, including any anticipated growth in such programs. (Note 7.6, 7.13, 7.15, 7.21-26; *Guideline #7 and #8*)

8. <u>Educational Effectiveness</u>: Identify the learning outcomes that have been established for the proposed program(s). Describe the mission-appropriate quantitative and qualitative measures of student success (including retention and graduation rates) that have been identified for the program(s). Discuss how the institution will assess student learning in the proposed program(s) as well as how assessment results will be used for improvement. (Note Standards 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8; Guideline #5)

9. <u>Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure</u>: Discuss how the institution has reviewed the Commission's standards on integrity and its own policies and procedures on integrity to ensure the appropriate consideration of any relevant issues. Provide information about how the proposed program(s) will be described in official institutional print and electronic publications. Discuss how the institution will ensure that students and prospective students understand the learning goals, resources, curriculum, and other aspects of the on-line program(s). (Note Standards 9.1, 9.8, 9.12; Guideline #9)

<u>Contractual arrangements</u>: If the institution enters into a contractual relationship with a non-regionally accredited entity to provide services or instruction for the proposed program(s), the narrative should conclude with a section that provides evidence that the arrangements comply with the Commission's standards (3.18, 4.10, 4.32, 9.26) and its Policy on Good Practices in Contractual Arrangements involving Courses and Programs). 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.)

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4. <u>Data Sheets</u>. The four distance education data forms are available on the NECHE website: <u>https://neche.org</u>

Submission of Report
Institutions should submit plans to offer distance education programming at least six months prior to intended implementation. One electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) and four (4) paper copies of the proposal, including data forms and appendices, should be sent to the Commission office. Proposals should be single spaced, printed on both sides of the paper and clipped together. Please do not use three-ring binders or elaborate printing options.

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.

August, 2011
April 2013
Editorial Revisions June 2015, July 2016