
Policy on the Review of ~~Electronically Offered~~ Degree and Certificate Programs Offered via Distance Education

The last ~~two several~~ decades have seen the emergence and increased ~~application of new technologies~~ use of technology for instruction by member colleges and universities. While ~~evolving electronic media have~~ technology has had an impact in a number of areas, of particular interest to the Commission has been the establishment of ~~technologically based~~ online education programs offered to students at a distance. These initiatives have enhanced the capacity of many institutions to meet the needs of more students, ~~but the nature of the electronic delivery systems has also introduced challenges for institutions and the Commission alike and to provide a wider range of educational opportunities to their traditional student populations.~~

This policy statement has been developed to ~~help meet those challenges. Its purposes are two fold:~~ assist ~~and otherwise encourage~~ institutions ~~to self-assess and as they develop distance programs and seek to~~ improve the quality of their distance education activities and to provide a basis for the Commission's ~~public assurance about the quality of review of~~ distance education programming, ~~offered by its affiliated colleges and universities in~~ keeping with the policy on substantive change.

The policy is applicable to affiliated institutions which offer (1) Title IV-eligible certificate or degree programs for which students may earn 50% or more of the credits through ~~technologically mediated instruction~~ experiences offered exclusively on-line 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 program, nor technologically mediated instruction provided to campus-based students.

Commission Review

Distance education programming, which meets the above definition and is undertaken by *an institution for the first time* is not automatically included within the institution's accreditation; it represents a substantive change (see the Commission's Policy on Substantive Change). The following procedures must be completed before such activities are included within the scope of the institution's accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education.

Notice to the Commission

It is the responsibility of an institution to notify the Commission about its intention to inaugurate distance education programming encompassed by this policy prior to the program being initiated and to provide a ~~report~~ substantive change proposal about its

plans for the projected activity programming. The report-proposal should demonstrate that these activities fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies, including (if applicable) the Policy on Contractual Arrangements Involving Courses and Programs. For assistance in developing its report-proposal, the institution should follow the directions in “Guidelines for Preparing Substantive Change Reports on the Establishment of Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education.” Institutions should also consult the C-RAC Guidelines for the Review of Distance Education (On-line Learning).

Review Processes

The institutional-report-institution’s substantive change proposal will be reviewed by the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting following the report’s-proposal’s receipt, provided it is received at least one month prior to the meeting by the published deadline. The range of possible actions includes approval of the report and inclusion of the activity programming in the institution’s accreditation and specification of future monitoring if necessary; conferral of general approval to offer distance education programming within the scope of the institution’s mission; deferral of action; and rejection of the report-proposal. The institution will be notified of the action taken shortly after the Commission meets.

Ongoing Monitoring

As a part of the interim (fifth-year) interim-report required of all colleges and universities on a ten-year evaluation cycle, the institution is expected to apprise the Commission of any significant developments regarding its distance education programming as outlined in the relevant procedural document on fifth-year interim reports.

Distance education activities-programming will be specifically reviewed through the comprehensive evaluation. The institution is expected to appropriately address such activities-matters in its self-study report.

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