

Guidelines for Distance Education

In order to facilitate the evaluation of distance education throughout the United States, the regional accrediting associations have agreed upon the following definition and guidelines. This agreement is based on an extension of the Principles developed by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE).

DEFINITION:

Distance education is defined, for the purposes of accreditation review, as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

GUIDELINES:

Any institution offering distance education is expected to meet the requirements of its own regional accrediting body, and be guided by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) Principles. In addition, an institution is expected to address, in its self-studies and/or proposals for institutional change, the following expectations, which it can anticipate will be reviewed by its regional accrediting commission.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Programs provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty, and among students.
- The institution's faculty assumes responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.
- The institution ensures that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs.
- The institution ensures the currency of materials, programs, and courses.
- The institution's distance education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products.
- The institution provides appropriate faculty support services specifically related to distance education.
- The institution provides appropriate training for faculty who teach in distance education programs.

Evaluation and Assessment

- The institution assesses student capability to succeed in distance education programs and applies this information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions.
- The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to campus-based programs.
- The institution ensures the integrity of student work and the credibility of the degrees and credits it awards.

Library and Learning Resources

- The institution ensures that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources.
- The institution monitors whether students make appropriate use of learning resources
- The institution provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs.

Student Services

- The institution provides adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programs, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, and placement and counseling.
- The institution provides an adequate means for resolving student complaints.
- The institution provides to students advertising, recruiting, and admissions information that adequately and accurately represents the programs, requirements, and services available.
- The institution ensures that students admitted possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed in the program, and provides aid to students who are experiencing difficulty using the required technology.

Facilities and Finances

- The institution possesses the equipment and technical expertise required for distance education.
- The institution's long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education program.