

Distance Education Standards for
Academic and Student Support Services;
Guidelines for Distance Education Credit
Program Array and Approval

BOARD OF REGENTS

Resolution:

That the board approves *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs* and *Guidelines for Distance Education Credit Program Array and Approval*.

**STANDARDS FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT
SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION CREDIT COURSES, DEGREE
AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

**GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION CREDIT PROGRAM
ARRAY AND APPROVAL**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In June 1999 the Board of Regents approved *Principles for Pricing Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*. Besides providing the foundation for a new tuition model for distance education courses and programs, these principles called for the development of system-wide standards to assure quality distance education programming. To develop these standards, a task force consisting of chancellors, vice chancellors, chief information officers, business officers, faculty, students and representative from UW System Administration developed *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*. While these standards are consistent with Guidelines for Distance Education in the NCA-CIHE Handbook of Accreditation (2nd ed. 9/97), they also exceed and supplement NCA guidelines.

The need to address distance education program array and approval within the UW System has been addressed by the second policy document: *Guidelines for Distance Education Credit Program Array and Approval*. That document provides a supplement to ACIS-1 (Academic Planning and Program Review). The same task force that developed the Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs developed these supplemental guidelines and procedures. These guidelines provide procedures for the approval of proposals to offer (a) new distance education degree programs, and (b) existing degree programs that will be offered via distance education. The intent is to make these additional processes expedient and efficient to facilitate distance education program development, while providing a mechanism to avoid unnecessary duplication and redundancy.

For the purposes of these policies, distance education is defined as follows:

Distance education is a planned teaching/learning experience in which teacher and students are separated by physical distance. In distance education courses and programs, student-teacher interaction may occur and course materials may be delivered in an asynchronous or synchronous mode over a wide spectrum of existing and evolving media.

REQUESTED ACTION

The UW System Administration requests approval of Resolution III, approving Guidelines for Distance Education Credit Program Array and Approval, and Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs.

RELATED REGENT POLICIES

ACIS-1, Guidelines for Distance Education Credit Program Array and Approval.

ACIS 5.4, Credit Outreach in the University of Wisconsin System, the Board of Regents Study of the UW System in the 21st Century.

FPPP 44, Tuition and Fee Policies for Credit Instruction.

G27, Copyrightable Instruction Materials Ownership, Use and Control), Principles for Pricing Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs (June 1999)

97-2, University Information Technology Resources.

STANDARDS FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION CREDIT COURSES, DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

1. Introduction

This policy will govern distance education courses and programs in the University of Wisconsin System. This policy has been developed in response to the Principles for Pricing Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs (approved by Board of Regents in June 1999). One of those principles stated, "Academic and student support services for distance education courses should adhere to system-wide standards to assure high quality distance education programming." These Standards build upon and supplement the Guidelines for Distance Education in the NCA-CIHE Handbook of Accreditation (2nd ed. 9/97).

For the purposes of this policy, distance education is defined as follows:

Distance education is a planned teaching/learning experience in which teacher and students are separated by physical distance. In distance education courses and programs student-teacher interaction may occur and course materials may be delivered in an asynchronous or synchronous mode over a wide spectrum of existing and evolving media.

A degree or certificate program is considered distance education when a substantial number of credit hours (fifty percent or more of the courses for the program) will be delivered through distance education. A course is considered distance education when the majority of instruction is delivered through distance education.

2. Standards for Academic and Student Support Services

A. Curriculum and Instruction

1. 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 quality of instruction and of the curriculum will be assured with distance education as it is with the traditional curriculum. Faculty members, departments, schools/colleges, and ultimately the institution itself are responsible for maintaining quality in the areas listed below.
2. The institution ensures that materials, programs, and courses are current.

3. The institution ensures that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs. Programs provide for instructional design appropriate to the technology employed.
4. The institution provides appropriate training for faculty who teach in distance education programs.
5. The institution provides appropriate faculty support services specifically related to distance education.
6. Programs provide timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty, and among students.
7. The institution is responsible for quality assurance for all aspects of the program. If the institution is using "third party" products, ad hoc instructors, purchased modules, specialized software or outsourcing aspects of the program, the institution must ensure the integrity of the program and the performance of the "subcontracted" agents or products.
8. The institution's distance education policies must be 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 (See G27: *Copyrightable Instruction Materials Ownership, Use and Control.*)
9. The institution provides a statement to students of its commitment to offer the course sequence advertised. Students need to know at the time that they are admitted what stipulations or conditions exist regarding the offering of courses in the program so that they can make an informed decision about enrolling.
10. The institution must address the needs of individuals with disabilities when planning for and developing distance education programs and courses. (See the *Report of the Committee on Access to Technology for Individuals with Disabilities*, December 1999, for additional guidelines and recommendations.)

B. Evaluation and Assessment

1. The institution will provide students with information about the expectations of the program. It is preferable to offer an orientation for students, which helps them assess their readiness for a distance education course/program. This may include an assessment, which evaluates such characteristics as attitude, motivation, and time management skills. Information about program requirements should also include

technical requirements that students must meet in order to participate in the course and have access to services. The institution will provide each student with a statement outlining the parameters of support.

2. The institution evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs (including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability to campus-based programs. Course evaluation includes questions regarding student satisfaction with such things as faculty accessibility, access to advising, computing services, library services, etc. For some distance education students a sense of "connectedness" to the campus and/or being part of a "community of learners" is important to their success. Campuses may wish to address these aspects in their evaluation instruments.
3. The institution ensures the integrity of student work and the credibility of the degrees and credits it awards. Distance education programs undergo program reviews in a comparable fashion to traditional programs. This may include an external review by specialists or UW colleagues. Courses offered by distance education that are part of a traditional program will be evaluated in the same manner as courses in the curriculum offered in the traditional manner.
4. The institution is responsible for ensuring that all distance education programs and courses meet the *UW Standards for Academic and Student Support Services Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*.

C. Library and Learning Resources

1. The institution ensures that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Authentication process for validation and identification
 - b. Interlibrary loan and document delivery service
 - c. Access to electronic resources in the Libraries collection
 - d. Electronic reference services, direct reference service via email and telephone
 - e. World Wide Web Distance Education Home Page with direct linkage to library services, self help modules, and appropriate electronic request forms
 - f. Facilitating instruction to enhance student's information-seeking skills
 - g. Provides an "800" number for library assistance
2. The institution monitors whether students make appropriate use of learning resources.
3. The institution provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs.

D. Student Services

1. 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.
2. The institution provides an adequate means for resolving student complaints.
3. The institution provides to students advertising, recruiting and admissions information that adequately and accurately represents the programs, requirements, and services available.
4. The institution provides timely and complete information for students on the equipment and knowledge required to use the technology employed in the program.
5. The institution provides "help desk" services that meet the needs of students in the program. Consideration will be given to providing timely assistance for technical problems, academic questions, billing questions, library research, textbooks, degree audit. While many programs will not require twenty-four hour services seven days a week, evening and/or weekend service will be needed by most students, especially out-of-state or international students who reside in different time-zones. The campus will establish response time standards for responding to student inquiries and inform students of the standards.

E. Facilities and Finances

1. The institution ensures that the appropriate equipment, facilities, technical expertise and financial planning exist to design and make the program sustainable over a period of time. Campuses must have the depth and breadth of faculty to maintain continuity of the program, and the support of the faculty in the program to make it successful. Faculty teaching distance education programs will have access to instructional design support to ensure the quality of the student learning experience.
2. 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.

3. Responsibility for Addressing *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services for Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs.*

The provosts at the UW System institutions are responsible for ensuring that their institutions adhere to these standards. Moreover, when institutions submit requests to UW System Administration for approval (a) to deliver an existing degree program via distance education, or (b) to request an entitlement to plan a new distance education degree program, they will address how they are meeting these standards. (See Program Array and Approval Guidelines and ACIS-1, Academic Planning and Program Review.) It is expected that institutions' ability to meet these standards will be operational when the program or course is actually implemented; all standards do not have to be operational at the time the institution submits a request to plan a distance education program.

GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION CREDIT PROGRAM ARRAY AND APPROVAL

1. Introduction

This policy will govern distance education credit program array and approval in the University of Wisconsin System. For the purposes of this policy, distance education is defined as follows:

Distance education is a planned teaching/learning experience in which teacher and students are separated by physical distance. In distance education courses and programs, student-teacher interaction may occur and course materials may be delivered in an asynchronous or synchronous mode over a wide spectrum of existing and evolving media.

A degree program is considered distance education when a substantial number of credit hours (fifty percent or more of the courses for the program) will be delivered through distance education.

2. Program Review Guidelines

A. This policy applies to all technologies, synchronous and asynchronous.

B. Policy concerning program approval and oversight will be consistent with ACIS-1 (Academic Planning and Program Review). That is, System Administration and Board of Regents approval will be necessary for distance education degree programs. Distance education certificate programs, concentrations, submajors, and other academic programs covered in ACIS-1 do not require System or Board of Regents approval. However, institutions will need to inform System Administration of their plans for distance education certificate programs, concentrations, submajors, and other academic programs covered in ACIS-1.

C. Requests to offer new distance education degree programs will follow the program approval guidelines outlined in ACIS-1 that apply to the development of all new programs. All steps of new program approval will proceed as they currently do except that there will be the additional review by the standing committee on distance education (described below). The additional procedure for approval of a distance education degree program will be as follows:

1. Institutions seeking a Request for Entitlement to Plan a new distance education degree program will note in a requesting proposal to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer (SVP/CAO) that the program is distance education and what efforts have been made to collaborate with other UW institutions.

2. The SVP/CAO will refer the proposal to the standing committee on distance education (see below).
 3. In requests for Authorization to Implement new distance education degree programs, institutions will address all program components (e.g. need, evaluation, facilities, academic and student support services) in the ACIS-1 sample format and follow all procedures for developing the proposal, including a Program Review Committee and external evaluation.
 4. Institutions will explain how they plan to address the *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*.
 5. Institutions will demonstrate need (such as market data) for offering the program via distance.
 6. Finance (Section 8 of the ACIS-1 sample format) will be adjusted for distance education, taking into account programs offered at a distance that are cost recovery and the utilization of common cost methodologies.*
 7. When new distance education degree programs undertake the Joint Review, institutions will address the same relevant distance education components identified above (collaboration, standards, and costing methodologies).
- D. Existing degree programs (i.e. when institutions have an existing program authorization and decide to offer the degree via distance education) will undergo an abbreviated and accelerated distance education program approval process. No Board of Regents action will be required for existing degree programs. The following procedure will be implemented:
1. Institutions will submit a proposal to the SVP/CAO requesting that the existing program be offered at a distance.
 2. The SVP/CAO will refer the proposal to the standing committee on distance education (see below).

* UW System is developing a common methodology to assist institutions in identifying the different types of costs involved in offering distance education, and in setting tuition levels to recoup those costs. The model takes into account the time spent by faculty, teaching assistants, curricular designers and support staff to offer courses/programs at a distance, in addition to the institution's overhead. Development costs, which largely occur in the first year, are amortized over a five-year period so that institutions can spread those costs over a period of time. Projected enrollment levels are also built into the methodology so that institutions can develop a cost per student. Institutions have the option to add on a market/demand factor in order to take advantage of market opportunities, as well as the option to reduce the tuition charged in order to meet their missions.

3. The proposal must address the following components: (a) institutional plans to adhere to the *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs*; (b) efforts to collaborate with UW institutions or institutions and organizations outside the state; and (c) the costing methodologies employed to determine any distance education fees or tuition adjustments.
 4. Institutions will cite market data to justify offering the program at a distance.
 5. Once institutions have been authorized to adapt an existing degree program to distance education, review of that program will occur during the regular institutional review cycle.
- E. Although this policy does not apply to individual distance education courses, institutions will be expected to ensure that distance education courses adhere to the *Standards for Academic and Student Support Services in Distance Education Credit Courses, Degree and Certificate Programs* in their regular, internal course development and review processes.
3. Responsibility for Distance Education Program Approval and Array
 - A. The office of Academic Affairs at UW System Administration is charged with the oversight of distance education program approval and array. To facilitate that oversight, and to encourage interinstitutional communication and collaboration, a standing committee on distance education will be formed. The committee should be composed primarily of provosts and will include appropriate administrative officers and staff appointed by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer. The committee will advise the SVP/CAO.
 1. The committee will consider institutional requests (a) to deliver an existing degree program via distance education, and (b) entitlements to plan a new distance education degree program. The committee will make recommendations to the SVP/CAO on the disposition of institutional requests to offer distance education degree programs.
 2. The committee will serve as a forum to facilitate discussion about potential collaboration among UW institutions offering similar distance education degree programs.
 3. The committee will be mindful of Regent policy concerning program approval and array (see ACIS-1, Section 1: Planning and Review Principles), including (a) relevance of the distance education program to institutional mission; (b) the efficient and effective use of resources; (c) interinstitutional planning; and (d) the need to

avoid unnecessary duplication. In addition, the committee will ensure that institutional plans for distance education programs address Academic and Student Support Services for Distance Education Students.

4. In its deliberations, the committee will consider how an existing degree program proposed to be offered at a distance or a new distance education degree program is comparable to other UW System programs. The committee will consider how these proposed programs would impact program array throughout the System.
- B. Institutions will have the option of appealing any final determination by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer by requesting a review by the President and the Chancellors of the respective institutions.