
Definition of Distance Education and Correspondence Education

Distance education (DE) and correspondence education (CE) are common delivery mechanisms in American higher education. A sizable number of institutions that are campus-based offer some portion of the curriculum and programs in a distance education format, and there are a relatively small, but growing number of institutions that offer educational services solely through distance education. In 2006, the Higher Education Act revised regulations that had restricted the use of distance education by institutions eligible for Title IV financial aid. Effective July 1 of that year, institutions were no longer restricted to offering less than 50% of a degree program via distance education in order to retain eligibility. The regulatory changes are likely to increase the number of programs campus-based institutions offer through distance education as well as generate opportunity for some new, solely distance education based institutions to emerge in the ACCJC/WASC region.

The Commission's "Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education" (See *Accreditation Reference Handbook*) has been revised continuously to reflect the changes made to the 2006 Higher Education Act and to the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that provides greater emphasis on Distance Education and Correspondence Education. The Commission Policy provides the following definitions of Distance Education and Correspondence Education. These definitions are congruent with the definitions in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. Note that correspondence education may be offered via the same delivery modes as distance education. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) focuses more closely on the nature of the interaction between instructor and student, and on aspects of the instruction delivered, to determine whether the course or program is distance education or correspondence education for purposes of Title IV.

Definition of Distance Education

"Distance education is defined, for the purpose of accreditation review as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which supports regular and substantive interaction between the students and instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. Distance education often incorporates technologies such as the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, in conjunction with any of the other technologies.

Definition of Correspondence Education

Correspondence education means:

- (1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor;
- (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student;
- (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and,
- (4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

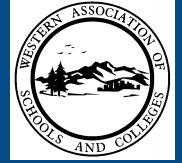
A Correspondence course is:

- (1) A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced;*
- (2) A course which is part correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course to be a correspondence course; and,*
- (3) Not distance education.”¹*

The Commission recognizes and embraces distance education as a convenient, flexible, and effective means of providing quality education. Many working students with multiple demands on their time find that distance education meets their needs better than campus-based education.

Many campus-based students are now taking at least part of their educational programming through distance education classes. For some institutions, the pedagogical strategies successfully used in distance education classes with distant students (for example, online chat rooms and electronic voting or feedback) have been incorporated into routine programs and services offered in classrooms on campus or provided for students who are physically on campus and do not necessarily need to use technology to connect with the campus.

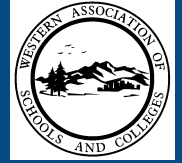
¹ Language is from the Federal Register 8/6/2009.



Quality Distance Education Program Webinar California Community College System

Dr. Susan Clifford, Vice President
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Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges/WASC



ONLINE INSTRUCTION: DEFINITION APPROPRIATE?

34 CFR § 602.17(g). The agency must apply the definitions of distance education and correspondence education to determine the mode being employed.



DISTANCE EDUCATION (DE)

- Instruction delivered to students who are separated from the instructor
- Regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor
- May use Internet, one- or two-way transmissions, audio/visual conferencing, DVDs or CD-ROMs

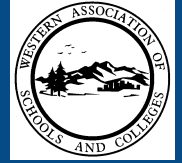
34 CFR § 602.3 (Definitions)



CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION (CE)

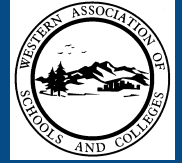
- Instructional material provided by mail or electronic transmission (including examinations) to students who are separated from the instructor
- Limited interaction between students and instructor and primarily initiated by students
- A course that is typically self-paced

34 CFR § 602.3 (Definitions)



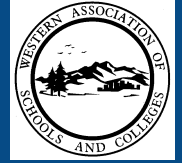
ONLINE INSTRUCTION: DEFINITION APPROPRIATE?

- The Commission must determine whether instruction offered with students separated from the instructor is:
 - the electronic equivalent of paperwork and reading (CE), or
 - required to, and does, involve regular and substantive interaction with the instructor, initiated by the instructor, and online activities are included in the grade (DE)



MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP OF DATA INDICATORS

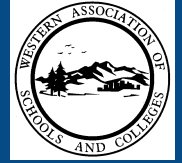
34 CFR § 602.19(a-e). The agency has and effectively applies monitoring and evaluation approaches.



C. ASSURING QUALITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND CORRESPONDENCE (DE/CE) LEARNING PROGRAMS

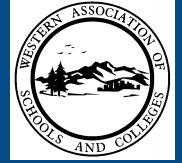
- Growth over time (number of courses offered, faculty teaching, and students enrolled)
- Increased student expectations for course delivery, admissions, orientation, registration, advising, tutoring services, communication, and other services
- Compatibility with institutional mission

Continued



QUALITY OF DE/CE COURSES *CONTINUED*

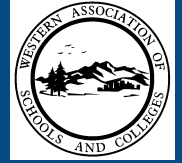
- Student achievement data (retention; course, program, certificate and degree completion, and rates) in DE/CE and face-to-face classes
- Student learning outcomes data in DE/CE and face-to-face classes
- Integrity (course content, grading, faculty teaching capability, student learning capability, faculty and student support, faculty and student assessment systems, integration with institutional mission)
- Verification of student identity



EVALUATING DISTANCE EDUCATION

- Does the college know where its DE students are from?
- Is there a policy that defines “regular and substantive contact” for DE courses?
- Are there required qualifications, training, evaluation, and professional development for DE faculty?
- How does the college prepare and monitor DE students to be successful?

Continued



EVALUATING DISTANCE EDUCATION

- What evidence is there of:
 - Use of college resources
 - Student identity validation
 - Accessibility of DE programs/services
 - Regular and effective contact between student and faculty
- Are there policies that dictate satisfactory progress?
- How comparable are the DE student support services (advising, tutoring, and learning resources) to those services offered to 'traditional' students?

Use resources provided by WCET @ wcet.wiche.edu