

# GUIDE TO EVALUATING DISTANCE EDUCATION AND CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION

*A Publication of the Accrediting Commission  
For Community and Junior Colleges  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges*

*For use in conjunction with the Guide to Evaluating Institutions*

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## Introduction and Definitions

### Introduction

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges is obliged by its purpose - to assure educational quality and institutional effectiveness - and by federal regulations to review the quality of distance education and correspondence education (DE/CE) during its comprehensive visits, follow-up visits, and substantive change reviews. This *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* is a tool in the ACCJC's series of resources to be used by institutions preparing their Self Evaluation Report of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness (formerly Self Study Report) and other reports and by teams conducting comprehensive visits and other visits.

This Guide should be read in conjunction with the *Guide to Evaluating Institutions*. Whereas the *Guide to Evaluating Institutions* is intended to provide some guidance for a holistic view of an institution and its quality, this *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* provides a focused view on the institution's quality in a particular area.

The Guide is structured around the ACCJC Accreditation Standards, and it raises questions to the Standards, where relevant, for DE/CE activities. The Guide is meant to provoke some thoughtful consideration about how the institution's DE/CE programs and services are integrated into the institutions' mission and planning processes and how institutions offer DE/CE programs and services that show a commitment to educational quality while demonstrating achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The questions in the Guide are not meant to imply that institutions are required to have separate processes and outcomes in place for their DE/CE activities if the processes and outcomes for traditional delivery have proven to apply effectively to DE/CE. The questions related to the integrity of DE/CE are also relevant for the institutions' use of technology in programs and services offered on campus.

The Guide begins with the Commission's definition of the terms Distance Education and Correspondence Education. The main body of the Guide is contained in "Questions to Use in Institutional Evaluation of Distance Education and Correspondence Education." Here the reader will find the 2002 Standards for Institutional Evaluation followed by sample questions about their application related to DE/CE at an institution. Not all the questions may be relevant to all institutions. The level of relevance depends on the extent to which the institutions offer DE/CE programs or courses. There are also many other questions that institutions could develop to stimulate thorough self-reflection. Likewise, there are many other questions team members can and should ask to determine the degree to which the institution is meeting the Accreditation Standards and assuring and improving educational quality and institutional effectiveness. The questions should not be used as a substitute for the Accreditation Standards or as substitutes for thorough introspection and examination.

At the end of each Standard, there is a list of potential sources of evidence relevant to support the reflections on the quality of the institution's DE/CE. This non-exhaustive list is not meant to indicate that each of the documents must be present, but that these might be sources of the evidence. There may be many other sources that institutions should provide and teams should look for.

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## Definition of Distance Education and Correspondence Education

Distance education and correspondence education are common delivery mechanisms in American higher education. A sizable proportion 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 fifty percent of a degree program via distance education in order to regain 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 WASC region.

The Commission 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.

### ***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.*

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*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.”<sup>1</sup>*

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 don't necessarily need to use technology to connect with the campus.

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<sup>1</sup> Language is from the Federal Register 8/6/2009

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# Questions to Use in Institutional Evaluation of Distance Education and Correspondence Education

## Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

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The institution demonstrates strong commitment to a mission that emphasizes achievement of student learning and to communicating the mission internally and externally. The institution uses analyses of quantitative and qualitative data and analysis in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, implementation, and re-evaluation to verify and improve the effectiveness by which the mission is accomplished.

### A. Mission

The institution has a statement of mission that defines the institution's broad educational purposes, its intended student population, and its commitment to achieving student learning.

- How does the institution's commitment to DE/CE align with its mission? Has the institution considered in consultation with its key constituents if and how DE/CE is congruent with the mission? Does the mission include any statements related to its commitment to distance and/or correspondence education?
  - Who are the intended students for the courses offered in DE/CE format; are they similar to or different from students studying in traditional learning mode? How does the institution determine its intended student population for courses offered in distance education and/or correspondence mode?
1. The institution establishes student learning programs and services aligned with its purposes, its character, and its student population.
    - By what means has the institution investigated that it is relevant for its community that courses are offered in DE/CE mode? How does the commitment to DE/CE align with its learning programs and services offered in traditional teaching format?
    - How does the institution know that its programs and courses offered in distance education mode and/or correspondence education mode and the associated services are addressing the needs of its student population?
  2. The mission statement is approved by the governing board and published.
  3. Using the institution's governance and decision-making processes, the institution reviews its mission statement on a regular basis and revises it as necessary.

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- Has the mission been reviewed to reflect the commitment to DE/CE and what was the rationale for the changes to the statement? How were the changes developed, approved and how does the institution know that they have been communicated effectively to all stakeholders?
4. The institution's mission is central to institutional planning and decision making.

## **B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness**

The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to produce and support student learning, measures that learning, assesses how well learning is occurring, and makes changes to improve student learning. The institution also organizes its key processes and allocates its resources to effectively support student learning. The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by providing 1) evidence of the achievement of student learning outcomes and 2) evidence of institution and program performance. The institution uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning.

The institution maintains an ongoing, collegial, self-reflective dialogue about the continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes.

- What parties are involved in the institution's dialog about the continuous improvement of student learning through DE/CE mode and how it compares with student learning in traditional programs? How is this dialog organized?
- About what subjects related to the improvement of DE/CE has the college engaged? What impact has the dialog had on student learning?

The institution sets goals to improve its effectiveness consistent with its stated purposes. The institution articulates its goals and states the objectives derived from them in measurable terms so that the degree to which they are achieved can be determined and widely discussed. The institutional members understand these goals and work collaboratively toward their achievement.

- Has the college defined specific goals and objectives for the effectiveness of its DE/CE activities? How are these goals and objectives defined?
- How does the institution measure if the goals and objectives for its distance education and/or correspondence learning activities are met? To what extent does the college use these goals and objectives to determine its priorities?
- Is there a college-wide understanding of these goals and the processes to implement them? How does the college ensure that there is an institutional commitment to achieve identified goals?

The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding the improvement of institutional effectiveness in an ongoing

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and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation. Evaluation is based on analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.

- Does the college have separate processes for the planning, approval, evaluation, and review of courses offered in DE/CE mode or are the processes similar to the courses offered in traditional face-to-face mode? What is the rationale for the chosen approach? How are these processes integrated into the college's overall planning process?
- How are the needs for fiscal, technical and human resources required for teaching DE/CE learning programs identified and integrated in the planning processes and assessed?
- To what extent are data such as on student admission, staff teaching distance and/or correspondence learning programs, retention, assessment and satisfaction related to DE/CE available? How are these data analyzed and used for planning and communicated to relevant staff and stakeholders?

The institution provides evidence that the planning process is broad-based, offers opportunities for input by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

- What mechanisms exist for involvement of appropriate constituencies in DE/CE in college planning?
- To what extent does the college allocate resources to fulfill its plans for DE/CE? When resources to fulfill plans are not available, does the college identify and follow strategies to increase its capacity, i.e., seek alternate means for securing resources?

The institution uses documented assessment results to communicate matters of quality assurance to appropriate constituencies.

- Are the assessment data collected for DE/CE different from data collected for traditional face-to-face education? What is the rationale? What types of assessment data does the college collect on learning programs and support offered in DE/CE format?
- How are these data communicated to the relevant stakeholders internally and externally?

The institution assures the effectiveness of its ongoing planning and resource allocation processes by systematically reviewing and modifying, as appropriate, all parts of the cycle, including institutional and other research efforts.

The institution assesses its evaluation mechanisms through a systematic review of their effectiveness in improving instructional programs, student support services, and library and other learning support services.

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- What mechanisms does the institution use to gather evidence about the effectiveness of DE/CE learning programs and related student and learning support services? Are they different from the mechanisms applied for review of traditional programs and services?
  - How effectively do evaluation processes and results contribute to improvement of DE/CE programs, related library and other student support and learning services?

### **Sources of Evidence: Examples for Standard I**

Listed below are examples of potential sources of evidence for Standard I. There may be many other sources that institutions should provide and teams should ask for.

## **Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness**

### **A. Mission**

- Evidence of analysis of how the institution's mission statement is developed, approved, and communicated to all stakeholders taking the institution's commitment to distance education and/or correspondence into consideration.
- Evidence of the process used for identifying the students interested in enrolling in DE/CE.
- Evidence of analysis of the relevance of DE/CE programs and services for the community.
- List of the institution's DE/CE courses and programs

## **Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness**

### **B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness**

- Evidence of institutional dialog about the continuous improvement of student learning in DE/CE mode.
- Evidence that clearly stated and measurable goals and objectives guide the college community in making decisions regarding its priorities related to DE/CE.
- Evidence of evaluation of progress on the achievement of goals and objectives related to DE/CE.
- List of all DE/CE courses/programs.
- Evidence of quantitative and qualitative data that support the analysis of achievement of goals and objectives for DE/CE.

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## Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

### B. Improving Institutional Effectiveness (*continued*)

- Evidence of mechanisms for allocation of resources to plans for DE/CE.
- Evidence of periodic and systematic assessment of the effectiveness of DE/CE.
- Evidence that the assessment data is effectively communicated to the appropriate constituencies.
- Evidence of current reviews of programs and support services including library services related to DE/CE and examples of improvements.

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## Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

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**T**he institution offers high-quality instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services that facilitate and demonstrate the achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The institution provides an environment that supports learning, enhances student understanding and appreciation of diversity, and encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students.

### A. Instructional Programs

The institution offers high-quality instructional programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student outcomes leading to degrees, certificates, employment, or transfer to other higher education institutions or programs consistent with its mission. Instructional programs are systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all instructional activities offered in the name of the institution.

1. The institution demonstrates that all instructional programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, address and meet the mission of the institution and uphold its integrity.<sup>1</sup>
  - How does the institution ensure that its DE/CE program offerings fit the stated mission of the institution?
  - How does the institution ensure that its DE/CE programs and services are of high quality, comparable with the institution's face-to-face offerings, and appropriate to an institution of higher education?
  - How does the institution choose the fields of study in which it offers DE/CE programs? What stakeholders are consulted about the choices of study in which the institution offers DE/CE and how are they consulted?
  - What are the student achievement outcomes of the institution's DE/CE programs; i.e., to what extent do students progress through and complete degrees and certificates, gain employment, or transfer to four-year institutions through DE/CE programs only or through a mix of DE/CE and face-to-face delivery?
  - By what means are DE/CE programs assessed for currency, teaching and learning strategies, and student learning outcomes, and are the assessment methods different from those methods applied for assessment of face-to-face programs? What is the rationale?

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- a. The institution identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with their educational preparation and the diversity, demographics, and economy of its communities. The institution relies upon research and analysis to identify student learning needs and to assess progress toward achieving stated learning outcomes.
- What research is conducted to inform the college what student learning needs are, including the academic and technical skills required, and if the needs can be effectively addressed through DE/CE?
  - What means does the institution use to assess students' educational preparation for DE/CE programs? How is this information incorporated into program planning?
  - What kind of research is being conducted to determine if students enrolled in DE/CE programs are achieving stated learning outcomes and if their level of achievement is comparable with students enrolled in traditional programs?
- b. The institution utilizes delivery systems and modes of instruction compatible with the objectives of the curriculum and appropriate to the current and future needs of its students.<sup>1</sup>
- How does the institution determine that delivery of instruction in DE/CE mode fits the objectives and content of its courses?
  - How are activities offered in DE/CE mode evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting student needs?
  - How effectively does DE/CE facilitate student learning? Is the level of effectiveness for facilitating student learning different from traditional delivery modes?
- c. The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements.
- What student learning outcomes has the institution identified for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees offered in DE/CE mode? Are the student learning outcomes different from outcomes in courses, programs, certificates, and degrees offered in traditional teaching mode? What is the rationale?
  - How and by whom are student learning outcomes for programs offered in DE/CE mode and strategies for attaining them created? Do the strategies take into account how DE/CE programs compare with traditional programs in terms of student achievement?
  - How and by whom are student learning outcomes and program outcomes for DE/CE assessed, and how are the assessment methods different from those

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used in the assessment of traditional programs? How are the results used for improvement, and who is involved in this dialog?

- If the institution uses course materials developed outside the institution for its programs offered in DE/CE format how are these materials assessed, and how does the institution ensure that the academic standard is comparable with its other programs?
2. The institution assures the quality and improvement of all instructional courses and programs offered in the name of the institution, including collegiate, developmental, and pre-collegiate courses and programs, continuing and community education, study abroad, short-term training courses and programs, programs for international students, and contract or other special programs, regardless of type of credit awarded, delivery mode, or location.<sup>1,2</sup>
- By what criteria and processes does the institution decide to offer developmental, pre-collegiate, continuing, and community education, short-term training, international student, or contract education programs in DE/CE mode?
  - Which of these (or other) categories of courses and programs does the institution offer in DE/CE mode?
  - What is the process for establishing and evaluating each type of course and program offered in DE/CE mode? How does the college determine the appropriate credit type of its courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode?
    - a. The institution uses established procedures to design, identify learning outcomes for, approve, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses and programs. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for establishing quality and improving instructional courses and programs.
  - What established policies and institutional processes guide the development and evaluation of courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode? Are they different from the policies and institutional processes that guide the development and evaluation of courses offered in traditional mode? What is the rationale?
  - What is the role of faculty and how is discipline expertise or teaching knowledge and expertise in the field of DE/CE used for establishing quality of these courses?
  - What processes exist to approve and administer DE/CE courses and programs? Are the processes effective?
  - How and how often are DE/CE courses and programs evaluated? How is the evaluation different from that of traditional courses and programs? What is the rationale?

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- What improvements to distance education and/ or correspondence education courses and programs have occurred as a result of evaluation?
    - b. The institution relies on faculty expertise and the assistance of advisory committees when appropriate to identify competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution regularly assesses student progress towards achieving those outcomes.
  - How are competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes determined for DE/CE? Are the means deployed different from those deployed for traditional programs? What is the rationale?
  - What is the role of faculty in this process? Has the institution established any advisory committees with expertise in DE/CE, and if so what is the role of such advisory committees?
  - Do students have a clear path to achieving the student learning outcomes required of a course, program, degree, or certificate offered in DE/CE mode, and what information is provided to students in that regard? How well does the institution achieve and evaluate the effectiveness of learning at each level?
    - c. High-quality instruction and appropriate breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning characterize all programs.
  - How does the institution demonstrate the quality of its instruction for programs and courses in DE/CE mode? What evidence exists that DE/CE programs are characterized by the variables cited in this standard? How does the college use these qualities (breadth, depth, etc.) to determine that a DE/CE program is collegiate or pre-collegiate level?
  - What institutional dialog has occurred to enhance understanding and agreement about the quality and level of its distance education and correspondence education programs? Who within the institution is involved in this dialog? How does staff with expertise in and experience from teaching courses in distance education and/or correspondence education mode participate in this dialog?
    - d. The institution uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that reflect the diverse needs and learning styles of its students.<sup>1</sup>
  - What assessment of student learning styles that relate to teaching in distance education and/or correspondence education mode has the college performed?
  - How does the institution demonstrate that it is meeting the needs and learning styles of its students? How are faculty and staff informed and kept up-to-date about learning needs and pedagogical approaches related to DE/CE?
  - Do courses in DE/CE mode include multiple ways of assessing student learning?
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- What teaching methodologies are commonly used in DE/CE programs? How are methodologies selected? Do faculty discuss the relationship between the selected teaching methodologies and student performance?
  - What efforts has the college made to match the teaching methodologies with particular needs of students and with learning styles? How effective are the instructional methodologies that the college uses in producing learning in DE/CE mode?
    - e. The institution evaluates all courses and programs through an on-going systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans.
  - How does the college evaluate the effectiveness of its courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode? Is the process similar to courses and programs offered in traditional mode? What is the rationale?
  - What types of data are available for DE/CE program evaluation? Does the evaluation include a curricular review?
  - How is the relevancy of a program offered in DE/CE mode determined?
  - How are results of evaluation of programs in DE/CE mode used in institutional planning? What changes/improvements in programs have occurred as a result of the consideration of program evaluations?
    - f. The institution engages in ongoing, systematic evaluation and integrated planning to assure currency and measure achievement of its stated student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution systematically strives to improve those outcomes and makes the results available to appropriate constituencies.
    - g. If an institution uses departmental course and/or program examinations, it validates their effectiveness in measuring student learning and minimizes test biases.
    - h. The institution awards credit based on student achievement of the course's stated learning outcomes. Units of credit awarded are consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms or equivalencies in higher education.
  - What policies does the institution have for the award of academic credit for DE/CE programs? Are the policies similar to the traditional programs? What is the rationale for the decision? Are these policies regularly reviewed, including review of the extent to which they are suited for DE/CE?
    - i. The institution awards degrees and certificates based on student achievement of a program's stated learning outcomes.

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3. The institution requires of all academic and vocational degree programs a component of general education based on a carefully considered philosophy that is clearly stated in its catalog. The institution, relying on the expertise of its faculty, determines the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education curriculum by examining the stated learning outcomes for the course.

General education has comprehensive learning outcomes for the students who complete it, including the following:

- a. An understanding of the basic content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge: areas include the humanities and fine arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.
  - b. A capability to be a productive individual and life-long learner: competency, computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis/logical thinking, and the ability to acquire knowledge through a variety of means.
    - Are any of the institution's general education courses offered in DE/CE mode? What is the rationale for this decision and is it stated clearly in its catalog? How is it communicated to all stakeholders?
    - What criteria does the college use to assure that the required skill level of students in DE/CE courses and programs meet collegiate standards?
    - By what means does the institution ensure that the students develop the listed skills in DE/CE mode? How does the institution know that these means are effective?
    - How well are students achieving these outcomes? What data exist about how well students are able to apply these skills to subsequent course-work, employment, or other endeavors?
  - c. A recognition of what it means to be an ethical human being and effective citizen: qualities include an appreciation of ethical principles; civility and interpersonal skills; respect for cultural diversity; historical and aesthetic sensitivity; and the willingness to assume civic, political, and social responsibilities locally, nationally, and globally.
4. All degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established interdisciplinary core.
  5. Students completing vocational and occupational certificates and degrees demonstrate technical and professional competencies that meet employment and other applicable standards and are prepared for external licensure and certification.

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6. The institution assures that students and prospective students receive clear and accurate information about educational courses and programs and transfer policies. The institution describes its degrees and certificates in terms of their purpose, content, course requirements, and expected student learning outcomes. In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning outcomes consistent with those in the institution's officially approved course outline.
    - How does the institution assure that information about its DE/CE programs is clear and accurate? Are student learning outcomes in these programs included in descriptions of courses and programs?
    - How do students enrolled in DE/CE programs receive information about the institution's degrees and certificates and in what format is the information available for reference? How does the institution verify that students receive a course syllabus that includes student learning outcomes and individual sections of courses adhere to the course objectives/learning outcomes?
      - a. The institution makes available to its students clearly stated transfer-of-credit policies in order to facilitate the mobility of students without penalty. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution certifies that the expected learning outcomes for transferred courses are comparable to the learning outcomes of its own courses. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements as appropriate to its mission.
      - How does the institution develop, implement, and evaluate articulation agreements for DE/CE programs? What principles apply to the transfer of credit from other DE/CE programs where articulation arrangements do not exist?
      - What principles apply for the approval of granting of credit for prior work experience in the institution's DE/CE programs?
      - b. When programs are eliminated or program requirements are significantly changed, the institution makes appropriate arrangements so that enrolled students may complete their education in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.<sup>3</sup>
      - c. The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently to prospective and current students, the public, and its personnel through its catalogs, statements, and publications, including those presented in electronic formats. It regularly reviews institutional policies, procedures, and publications to assure integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.<sup>7</sup>
    - Through what means does the institution represent itself about its DE/CE programs? How are these means reviewed? Are they effective in reaching the

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potential students for DE/CE programs? How does the institution know that they are effective?

- Does the institution provide information to the public on student achievement in DE/CE programs? How does the institution ensure that information is current, accurate and aligned with the DE/CE provision?
7. In order to assure the academic integrity of the teaching-learning process, the institution uses and makes public governing board-adopted policies on academic freedom and responsibility, student academic honesty, and specific institutional beliefs or worldviews. These policies make clear the institution's commitment to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.
- a. Faculty distinguish between personal conviction and professionally accepted views in a discipline. They present data and information fairly and objectively.
  - b. The institution establishes and publishes clear expectations concerning student academic honesty and the consequences for dishonesty.
- Does the institution have a college-wide policy on academic honesty? Does the policy address issues on academic honesty, including verification of student identity, in relation to registration for, participation in, and completion of DE/CE?
  - What mechanisms does the institution have for informing students and faculty about, and enforcing, its policies on academic honesty, including in DE/CE programs? Does the policy appropriately ensure the protection of student privacy in the verification process?
  - What mechanisms for verification of students enrolled in DE/CE programs does the institution have? Do these mechanisms include either a secure login and password and/or proctored exams and/or other effective technologies and practices for verifying student identity? Are the mechanisms regularly reviewed and how does the institution know that the mechanisms are effective in ensuring that the student who registers for a course is the same student who participates and completes the course?
  - How are policies and information about academic honesty and student verification made available to students, faculty, staff and the public? How does the college know that the promulgation of this information is effective?
  - Does the institution have any prevention strategies in place to promote student verification? Are faculty members encouraged to promote student verification in the design of DE/CE courses? Is academic integrity including student verification covered in staff training and development? (*For practices on student verification refer to WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies at <http://wcet.wiche.edu/wcet/docs/cigs/studentauthentication/BestPractices.pdf>*)

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- To what extent is institutional data about incidents of academic dishonesty available and what types of data are available?
  - c. Institutions that require conformity to specific codes of conduct of staff, faculty, administrators, or students, or that seek to instill specific beliefs or worldviews, give clear prior notice of such policies, including statements in the catalog and/or appropriate faculty or student handbooks.
8. Institutions offering curricula in foreign locations to students other than U.S. nationals operate in conformity with standards and applicable Commission policies.<sup>2</sup>
- Does the institution promote its distance education in foreign locations? How is the promotion of these activities overseas in line with the institution's mission and the objectives for its DE/CE?
  - Does the institution enroll students who do not reside in the U.S. into programs? How does it ensure that the foreign students appropriately comply with the admission requirements for the programs? Are all students admitted to the programs recognized as U.S. students?

## B. Student Support Services

The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission. Student support services address the identified needs of students and enhance a supportive learning environment. The entire student pathway through the institutional experience is characterized by a concern for student access, progress, learning, and success. The institution systematically assesses student support services using student learning outcomes, faculty and staff input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

- How does the institution determine that students admitted to its DE/CE programs are able to benefit from these programs? How is this information taken into consideration in admissions policies and procedures?
  - What college-wide discussions have occurred about how student access, progress, learning, and success are consistently supported and how these findings impact of the DE/CE programs? To what extent are students involved in this dialog?
  - What improvements have been made to the effectiveness of these services?
1. The institution assures the quality of student support services and demonstrates that these services, regardless of location or means of

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delivery, support student learning and enhance achievement of the mission of the institution.<sup>1,2</sup>

- How does the institution identify the needs for support services related to DE/CE programs, and how does it ensure that these needs are addressed? By what means does the institution assure the quality of its student support services for students enrolled in distance education and correspondence education programs? How does the institution demonstrate that these services support student learning in programs offered in DE/CE? What data can the institution provide that show support of student learning?
  
- 2. The institution provides a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:
  - a. General Information
    - Official Name, Address(es), Telephone Number(s), and Web Site Address of the Institution
    - Educational Mission
    - Course, Program, and Degree Offerings
    - Academic Calendar and Program Length
    - Academic Freedom Statement
    - Available Student Financial Aid
    - Available Learning Resources
    - Names and Degrees of Administrators and Faculty
    - Names of Governing Board Members
  
  - How does the institution address issues of academic freedom, student financial aid, and available learning resources as they apply to distance education and correspondence education? Are the means applied differently from traditional education? What is the rationale?
  
  - How does the catalog describe the instructional delivery applied in the DE/CE courses, programs, and degree offerings? How does the catalog present the interaction between faculty and students and the accessibility of faculty and staff to students?
  
  - Is the catalog provided in both printed and electronic format?
    - b. Requirements
      - Admissions
      - Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
      - Degree, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer
  
  - Are the admission policies and admission requirements the same for traditional programs and for programs offered in DE/CE mode? What is the rationale? How

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does the institution present the admission requirements related to DE/CE programs?

- Are the fees for DE/CE courses the same as for traditional courses? To what extent are issues related to student fees and other financial obligations addressed in a clear and forthright manner?
  - c. Major Policies Affecting Students
    - Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
    - Nondiscrimination
    - Acceptance of Transfer Credits
    - Grievance and Complaint Procedures
    - Sexual Harassment
    - Refund of Fees
  - Do the same major policies affecting students apply to students enrolled in DE/CE programs as for traditional programs?
  - Does the institution have policies for all the areas listed under this standard?
    - d. Locations or Publications Where Other Policies may be Found
  - What process does the college use to ensure that the information in its publications is easily accessible to students, including students enrolled in DE/CE, prospective students, and the public?
  - When policies are not included in the catalog, are the publications in which they are found easily accessible for students with remote access to the institution's policies and other information?
  - Does the institution record student complaints/grievances filed by students studying in DE/CE mode? Are these records made available to the team? Does the number of complaints/grievances from students studying in DE/CE mode differ from complaints/grievances filed by students studying in traditional mode?
- 3. The institution researches and identifies the learning support needs of its student population and provides appropriate services and programs to address those needs.
- By what means does the institution determine the learning support needs of its students enrolled in DE/CE courses? How well does it address these needs?
  - a. The institution assures equitable access to all of its students by providing appropriate, comprehensive, and reliable services to students regardless of service location or delivery method.<sup>1</sup>

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- How does the institution assure access to appropriate, comprehensive, and reliable services, such as but not limited to orientation, tutoring and counseling, delivery of materials to students with remote access to information?
  - What evidence is provided that the institution assesses student needs for services related to DE/CE and effectively provides for them? What evidence exists that the services and responses from faculty are provided in a timely manner to students in DE/CE programs?
  - How are on-line services for DE/CE students evaluated? How well are services meeting the needs of students?
    - b. The institution provides an environment that encourages personal and civic responsibility, as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students.
  - What is the institution doing to provide a learning environment for students in DE/CE that promotes these personal attributes? What dialog has the institution engaged in concerning what constitutes a good learning environment for DE/CE?
    - c. The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates counseling and/or academic advising programs to support student development and success and prepares faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function.
  - How does the institution develop, implement, and evaluate counseling and/or academic advising and how do these initiatives ensure that the needs of DE/CE students are effectively addressed?
  - How are faculty and staff briefed and trained in counseling and providing advice to DE/CE students and in addressing issues related to the distance education and correspondence education mode?
  - Does the evaluation of counseling and/or academic advising include how it enhances DE/CE student development and success?
    - d. The institution designs and maintains appropriate programs, practices, and services that support and enhance student understanding and appreciation of diversity.
  - What does the institution do to promote student understanding and appreciation of diversity in the on-line teaching environment? What measures does the institution use to determine the effectiveness of services?
    - e. The institution regularly evaluates admissions and placement instruments and practices to validate their effectiveness while minimizing biases.

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- What processes are used to evaluate the effectiveness of practices and tools of admissions to DE/CE programs? Are they different from the tools used for traditional programs? What is the rationale?
  - What evaluations of placement processes are used to ensure their consistency and effectiveness? Are the processes the same for DE/CE programs and traditional programs? How are cultural and linguistic biases in the instruments and processes minimized?
    - f. The institution maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially, with provision for secure backup of all files, regardless of the form in which those files are maintained. The institution publishes and follows established policies for release of student records.
  - 4. The institution evaluates student support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.
  - How does the institution provide for systematic and regular review of its student support services available to DE/CE students? Are the reviews for DE/CE similar to traditional education? How are the results used?
  - Do the evaluations of DE/CE assess how student support services contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes? How are evaluation results used to improve services?

## C. Library and Learning Support Services

Library and other learning support services for students are sufficient to support the institution's instructional programs and intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural activities in whatever format and wherever they are offered. Such services include library services and collections, tutoring, learning centers, computer laboratories, and learning technology development and training. The institution provides access and training to students so that library and other learning support services may be used effectively and efficiently. The institution systematically assesses these services using student learning outcomes, faculty input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of the services.

1. The institution supports the quality of its instructional programs by providing library and other learning support services that are sufficient in quantity, currency, depth, and variety to facilitate educational offerings, regardless of location or means of delivery.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. Relying on appropriate expertise of faculty, including librarians and other learning support services professionals, the institution selects and maintains

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educational equipment and materials to support student learning and enhance the achievement of the mission of the institution.

- What information about the learning needs of DE/CE students is provided by other instructional faculty and staff to inform the selection of library resources?
  - What equipment to support student learning is available to students studying in DE/CE mode?
  - By what means is the library collection made available to students with remote access to the institution? How does the institution know that these means address the learning needs of the students?
  - What information does the library use to determine whether it is enhancing student achievement of identified learning outcomes for students studying in DE/CE mode?
- b. The institution provides ongoing instruction for users of library and other learning support services so that students are able to develop skills in information competency.
- By what means does the institution provide instruction to users of the library and other support services, and how does it take into account the needs of students with remote access to the institution?
- c. The institution provides students and personnel responsible for student learning programs and services adequate access to the library and other learning support services, regardless of their location or means of delivery.<sup>1</sup>
- What is the availability of electronic access to library materials? Does the institution deploy other means of availability to library and other student learning resources than electronic access?
  - Are distance education or correspondence education students equally supported by library services and accessibility as students in traditional programs? By what means does the institution provide support, and what is the availability of this support? How does the institution ensure that this support is provided in a timely manner?
- d. The institution provides effective maintenance and security for its library and other learning support services.
- How does the institution ensure that the students registered for a course are the students making use of the library and other learning support services?

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- e. When the institution relies on or collaborates with other institutions or other sources for library and other learning support services for its instructional programs, it documents that formal agreements exist and that such resources and services are adequate for the institution's intended purposes, are easily accessible, and utilized. The performance of these services is evaluated on a regular basis. The institution takes responsibility for and assures the reliability of all services provided either directly or through contractual arrangement.
2. The institution evaluates library and other learning support services to assure their adequacy in meeting identified student needs. Evaluation of these services provides evidence that they contribute to the achievement of student learning outcomes. The institution uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.
    - What methods does the institution use to evaluate its library and other learning support services? Does the evaluation include assessment of use, access, and relationship of the services to intended student learning for distance education or correspondence education programs? Does the evaluation include input by faculty, staff, and students?

### **Sources of Evidence: Examples for Standard II**

Listed below are examples of potential sources of evidence for Standard II. There may be many other sources that institutions should provide and teams should ask for.

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## Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

### A. Instructional Programs

- Evidence that distance education and correspondence education offerings are in keeping with the institution's mission.
- Evidence that the quality of all distance education and correspondence education programs is consistently determined to meet a high standard.
- Evidence of the annual growth in headcount enrollment into DE/CE programs\*.
- Evidence of analytical reviews demonstrating that instructional programs are relevant to the interest, needs, goals, and aspirations of the students served in DE/CE courses and programs offered by the institution.
- Evidence that students are achieving stated learning outcomes developed for the DE/CE programs.
- Evidence that the institution considers how instruction is delivered and how it assesses that delivery of DE/CE programs is both appropriate and current.
- Evidence of assessment of student achievement data for students enrolled in DE/CE programs.
- Evidence of review of assessment results from DE/CE programs and utilization for improvement of student learning.
- Evidence of procedures to design, identify learning outcomes for, approve, administer, deliver and evaluate DE/CE courses and programs. Evidence of the role played by advisory committees and faculty with expertise in DE/CE.
- Evidence of the role played by advisory committees and faculty with expertise in DE/CE.
- Evidence that DE/CE programs are appropriately sequenced to provide the bases for subsequent courses.
- Evidence that distance education and correspondence education courses are of sufficient content, breadth, and length to permit the student to learn and practice expected knowledge, skills, and abilities.

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\* Accreditors are required by the U.S.D.E to monitor overall growth of the institutions it accredits at least annually and collect headcount enrollment data, including for DE/CE programs.

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## Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

### A. Instructional Programs (*continued*)

- Evidence that diverse methods of instruction are used that address student needs, and learning styles are appropriate for DE/CE.
- Evidence of regular, systematic evaluation and review of DE/CE courses and programs
- Evidence that evaluation results are used for improvement.
- Evidence that the rationale for offering general education in distance education mode is communicated to students, employers, and other constituencies.
- Evidence that clear and complete information about degrees and certificates offered in DE/CE mode is made available to students in publications and course syllabi.
- Evidence that transfer policies are made available to students and how they apply to DE/CE.
- Evidence that articulation agreements including DE/CE courses exist and are regularly evaluated.
- Evidence that publications and other representations of the college that relate to its DE/CE activities are clear and accurate.
- Evidence that the college has appropriate and effective mechanisms in place to verify that the students registered are the students participating in the DE/CE courses and programs.
- Evidence that the mechanisms for student verification appropriately protect the students' privacy.
- Evidence of how these policies on academic honesty are disseminated to students enrolled in DE/CE programs.
- Evidence that the college's admission policies are applied to students who do not reside in the U.S and who are not U.S. nationals.

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## Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

### B. Student Support Services

- Evidence that student support services support learning relevant for DE/CE.
- Evidence that the catalog containing the specified items and other policies are made available to distance education and correspondence education students in an appropriate format.
- Description of the services provided that are developed to address the needs of students with remote access to the institution.
- Data on use of support services by remote users, students as well as faculty.
- Evidence that the institution assesses distance education and/or correspondence student needs for services and effectively provides for them.
- Evidence of how the college considers and ensures that equitable access includes it students enrolled in DE/CE programs.
- Evidence that the means used to ensure equitable access are regularly evaluated and that they are effective.
- Evidence that activities encouraging personal development are appropriately made available to students with remote access to the institution.
- Evidence that the institution develops, implements, and evaluates counseling and/or academic advising that takes into account the needs of students enrolled in DE/CE programs.
- Evidence that those responsible for counseling/ advising are trained to address the needs of students enrolled in DE/CE programs and address these needs in a timely manner.
- Evidence that the institution develops, implements, and evaluates the effectiveness of services in enhancing student understanding and appreciation of diversity that are adapted to the on-line teaching and learning environment.
- Evidence that admissions practices and placement instruments are regularly evaluated and that they are effective for DE/CE students.
- Evidence that analysis of review of student service programs includes verification that services contribute to student learning outcomes achieved through DE/CE programs.

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## Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

### B. Student Support Services (*continued*)

- Evidence that the institution maintains a file of student complaints/grievances that identify complaints/grievances filed by DE/CE students.
- Evidence that the library and other student learning services (LSS) support DE/CE programs and take into the account the needs of students.
- Evidence that the library and LSS provide support in a timely manner.
- Evidence that evaluations of library resources include and address the needs of student with remote access to the library and LSS.
- Evidence that that the library and LSS enhance achievement for students studying in DE/CE mode.
- Evidence that the college provides appropriate instructions for the use of the library and LSS to students enrolled in DE/CE courses.
- Evidence that there is access to library and LSS for remote students/staff institutional policies on remote access, including personnel policies that describe access provided to educational staff.
- Description of remote access practice—computer based, circulation of volumes, etc., for each remote site or population.
- Evidence of the effectiveness of the remote access to LSS.
- Description of use of library and LSS by remote users - students, faculty.

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## Standard III: Resources

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The institution effectively uses its human, physical, technology, and financial resources to achieve its broad educational purposes, including stated student learning outcomes, and to improve institutional effectiveness.

### A. Human Resources

The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services wherever offered and by whatever means delivered, and to improve institutional effectiveness. Personnel are treated equitably, are evaluated regularly and systematically, and are provided opportunities for professional development. Consistent with its mission, the institution demonstrates its commitment to the significant educational role played by persons of diverse backgrounds by making positive efforts to encourage such diversity. Human resource planning is integrated with institutional planning.

1. The institution assures the integrity and quality of its programs and services by employing personnel who are qualified by appropriate education, training, and experience to provide and support these programs and services.
  - What analyses and discussions have led the institution to determine the qualifications of faculty and staff involved in offering distance education and correspondence education?
    - a. Criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated. Job descriptions are directly related to institutional mission and goals and accurately reflect position duties, responsibilities, and authority. Criteria for selection of faculty include knowledge of the subject matter or service to be performed (as determined by individuals with discipline expertise), effective teaching, scholarly activities, and potential to contribute to the mission of the institution. Institutional faculty play a significant role in selection of new faculty. Degrees held by faculty and administrators are from institutions accredited by recognized U.S. accrediting agencies. Degrees from non-U.S. institutions are recognized only if equivalence has been established.<sup>4</sup>
  - Does the institution advertise specifically for personnel with expertise and experience in DE/CE? What is the rationale?
  - How does the college decide whether an applicant is well qualified in the field of DE/CE? Has the institution formulated specific selection criteria?
  - To what extent does the institution involve personnel with experience in DE/CE in the recruitment of new personnel?

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- By what methods does the college define and evaluate “effective teaching” in its hiring processes for faculty to be involved in DE/CE? How is that effectiveness judged?
    - b. The institution assures the effectiveness of its human resources by evaluating all personnel systematically and at stated intervals. The institution establishes written criteria for evaluating all personnel, including performance of assigned duties and participation in institutional responsibilities and other activities appropriate to their expertise. Evaluation processes seek to assess effectiveness of personnel and encourage improvement. Actions taken following evaluations are formal, timely, and documented.
  - Do evaluation criteria specifically measure the effectiveness of personnel in performing their duties related to distance education and correspondence education activities?
  - To what extent do the evaluation processes identify areas for improvement of duties related to distance education and correspondence education activities, including faculty’s interest in future involvement in this field or need for development?
    - c. Faculty and others directly responsible for student progress toward achieving stated student learning outcomes have, as a component of their evaluation, effectiveness in producing those learning outcomes.
  - What discussions have faculty had about how to improve learning outcomes in DE/CE? What plans have been made?
  - What changes have faculty made in teaching methodologies to improve learning in DE/CE mode after evaluation and analysis of evidence of effectiveness?
  - What changes in course content or sequencing of DE/CE courses have resulted from analyses of how well students are mastering course content?
  - What methods has the institution developed to evaluate effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes? Do these methods cover the effectiveness of producing student learning outcomes in DE/CE mode? Are these methods yielding meaningful and useful results?
  - How has staff development supported faculty performance in satisfactory achievement and assessment of student learning outcomes in DE/CE courses? What kinds of support have been provided to staff?
    - d. The institution upholds a written code of professional ethics for all of its personnel.
  - How does the institution address issues of professional ethics related to DE/CE and do these efforts foster ethical behavior of employees? Are these

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issues included in the Code of Ethics? What is the rationale for the approach?

2. The institution maintains a sufficient number of qualified faculty with full-time responsibility to the institution. The institution has a sufficient number of staff and administrators with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support the institution's mission and purposes.
  - By what means does the institution determine appropriate staffing levels for each program and service involved in the offering of programs and courses in DE/CE mode?
  - How does the institution decide on the organization of administrative and support staffing for DE/CE mode?
  - How effectively does the number and organization of the institution's personnel work to support its DE/CE programs and services? How does the institution evaluate this effectiveness?
3. The institution systematically develops personnel policies and procedures that are available for information and review. Such policies and procedures are equitably and consistently administered.
  - a. The institution establishes and adheres to written policies ensuring fairness in all employment procedures.
  - b. The institution makes provision for the security and confidentiality of personnel records. Each employee has access to his/her personnel records in accordance with law.
4. The institution demonstrates through policies and practices an appropriate understanding of and concern for issues of equity and diversity.
  - a. The institution creates and maintains appropriate programs, practices, and services that support its diverse personnel.
  - b. The institution regularly assesses its record in employment equity and diversity consistent with its mission.
  - c. The institution subscribes to, advocates, and demonstrates integrity in the treatment of its administration, faculty, staff and students.
5. The institution provides all personnel with appropriate opportunities for continued professional development, consistent with the institutional mission and based on identified teaching and learning needs.
  - a. The institution plans professional development activities to meet the needs of its personnel.
  - What professional development programs relevant for DE/CE personnel does the institution support?

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- How does the institution determine the professional development needs of its personnel involved in DE/CE?
  - What development programs on teaching methodologies in distance education does the institution provide?
    - b. With the assistance of the participants, the institution systematically evaluates professional development programs and uses the results of these evaluations as the basis for improvement.
  - What impact do professional development activities related to DE/CE have on the improvement of teaching and learning? How does the institution evaluate that improvement?
6. Human resource planning is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of human resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement.

## **B. Physical Resources**

**Physical resources, which include facilities, equipment, land, and other assets, support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness. Physical resource planning is integrated with institutional planning.**

1. The institution provides safe and sufficient physical resources that support and assure the integrity and quality of its programs and services, regardless of location or means of delivery<sup>1</sup>.
  - Through which research and analysis does the institution identify the needs for equipment and other facilities needed to support and assure the integrity and quality of its programs and services provided in DE/CE mode?
  - Upon what data has the institution determined the sufficiency of this equipment? What mechanisms does the college employ to evaluate how effectively equipment and facilities meet the needs of programs and services in DE/CE mode?
  - How well does the institution meet its equipment needs for distance education? Are the equipment needs included in the facilities evaluations that the institution conducts?
  - How does the college use the results of evaluations to improve equipment? Does the college employ similar processes to assure the safety and sufficiency of its equipment?

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- a. The institution plans, builds, maintains, and upgrades or replaces its physical resources in a manner that assures effective utilization and the continuing quality necessary to support its programs and services.
  - What processes ensure that program and service needs determine equipment replacement and maintenance for DE/CE provision?
  - How does the institution evaluate effectiveness of equipment in meeting the needs of programs and services offered in DE mode?
    - b. The institution assures that physical resources at all locations where it offers courses, programs, and services are constructed and maintained to assure access, safety, security, and a healthful learning and working environment.
  2. To assure the feasibility and effectiveness of physical resources in supporting institutional programs and services, the institution plans and evaluates its facilities and equipment on a regular basis, taking utilization and other relevant data into account.
    - By what process does the institution assess the use of its facilities? Does the process also include the needs for equipment used for course offerings in DE mode? How often does the evaluation occur?
    - How does the college use the results of the evaluation to improve facilities and/or equipment?
      - a. Long-range capital plans support institutional improvement goals and reflect projections of the total cost of ownership of new facilities and equipment.
    - How do the long range capital plans support improvement goals and reflect projections related to equipment needed for DE/CE?
      - b. Physical resource planning is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of physical resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement.

## C. Technology Resources

Technology resources are used to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. Technology planning is integrated with institutional planning.

1. The institution assures that any technology support it provides is designed to meet the needs of learning, teaching, college-wide communications, research, and operational systems.

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- How does the institution make sure that its technology needs for distance education and/or correspondence are identified?
  - How does the institution evaluate the effectiveness of this technology in meeting its range of needs? How effectively are those needs met?
    - a. Technology services, professional support, facilities, hardware, and software are designed to enhance the operation and effectiveness of the institution.
  - How does the institution make decisions about technology services, hardware, and software to ensure that the needs of faculty responsible for DE/CE are met?
  - By what processes does the institution determine the technology solutions, which are appropriate for its DE/CE courses and services?
  - Whether technology is provided directly by the institution or through contractual arrangements, are there provisions for reliability, disaster recovery, privacy, and security to ensure that the technology platform for distance education courses and programs is reliable and sustainable?
    - b. The institution provides quality training in the effective application of its information technology to students and personnel.
  - How does the institution assess the need for information technology training and provision of other types of information either written or provided in live electronic format for students and personnel engaged in DE/CE?
  - What technology training and information does the institution provide to students and personnel engaged in DE/CE courses and programs? Is the training different from training and information to students and personnel engaged in a traditional teaching mode? What is the rationale?
  - How does the institution ensure that the training and technical support it provides for faculty, staff and students is appropriate and effective? How effective is the training and information provided?
  - By what means does the institution provide training and information to faculty, staff, and students? How does the institution ensure that the training and information is provided in a timely manner?
  - How does the institution ensure that technology support is provided in a timely manner and how is the support organized?
    - c. The institution systematically plans, acquires, maintains, and upgrades or replaces technology infrastructure and equipment to meet institutional needs.

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- d. The distribution and utilization of technology resources support the development, maintenance, and enhancement of its programs and services.
- How does the institution make decisions about use and distribution of its technology resources in relation to DE/CE?
  - What provisions has the institution made to assure a robust and secure technical infrastructure, providing maximum reliability for students and faculty when offering its DE/CE courses and programs?
  - What policies or procedures does the institution have in place to keep the infrastructure necessary to maintain an effective platform for DE/CE reasonably up-to-date?
  - How effectively is technology distributed and used?
2. Technology planning is integrated with institutional planning. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of technology resources and uses the results of evaluation as the basis for improvement.
- What evidence is there that the institution bases its technology decisions on the results of evaluation of program and service needs and that the evaluation includes the needs related to DE/CE?
  - How does the institution determine that technology needs in distance education programs and services are met effectively?
  - How does the institution prioritize needs when making decisions about technology purchases relevant for distance education? How effectively are those needs met?

## D. Financial Resources

Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. The distribution of resources supports the development, maintenance, and enhancement of programs and services. The institution plans and manages its financial affairs with integrity and in a manner that ensures financial stability. The level of financial resources provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial solvency. Financial resources planning is integrated with institutional planning.

- Does the institution have a separate budget for distance education activities? Does the budget provide sufficient resources for the effective planning, maintenance, implementation and enhancement of distance education courses, programs and services as well as personnel development?

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1. The institution relies upon its mission and goals as the foundation for financial planning.
    - a. Financial planning is integrated with and supports all institutional planning.
    - b. Institutional planning reflects realistic assessment of financial resource availability, development of financial resources, partnerships, and expenditure requirements.
    - c. When making short-range financial plans, the institution considers its long-range financial priorities to assure financial stability. The institution clearly identifies and plans for payment of liabilities and future obligations.
  - What evidence exists that the need for technology enhanced facilities and equipment appropriate to meeting distance education and/or correspondence program and course objectives is part of the long-term integrated planning and budgeting activities? To what extent does the long-term planning and priorities take DE/CE needs into account?
    - d. The institution clearly defines and follows its guidelines and processes for financial planning and budget development, with all constituencies having appropriate opportunities to participate in the development of institutional plans and budgets.
  2. To assure the financial integrity of the institution and responsible use of financial resources, the financial management system has appropriate control mechanisms and widely disseminates dependable and timely information for sound financial decision making.
    - a. Financial documents, including the budget and independent audit, reflect appropriate allocation and use of financial resources to support student learning programs and services. Institutional responses to external audit findings are comprehensive, timely, and communicated appropriately.
    - b. Appropriate financial information is provided throughout the institution.
    - c. The institution has sufficient cash flow and reserves to maintain stability, strategies for appropriate risk management, and realistic plans to meet financial emergencies and unforeseen occurrences.
    - d. The institution practices effective oversight of finances, including management of financial aid, grants, externally funded programs, contractual relationships, auxiliary organizations or foundations, and institutional investments and assets.
    - e. All financial resources, including those from auxiliary activities, fund-raising efforts, and grants are used with integrity in a manner consistent with the mission and goals of the institution.
    - f. Contractual agreements with external entities are consistent with the mission and goals of the institution, governed by institutional policies, and contain appropriate provisions to maintain the integrity of the institution.<sup>5</sup>

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- Does the institution have any contractual agreements that relate for example to the provision of support to students, staff, and faculty involved in DE/CE and the technology platform used for DE/CE activities? What are the contractual arrangements, and are they consistent with institutional mission and goals?
  - Does the institution have appropriate control over these contracts? Can it change or terminate contracts that do not meet its required standards of quality?
    - g. The institution regularly evaluates its financial management processes, and the results of the evaluation are used to improve financial management systems.
3. The institution systematically assesses the effective use of financial resources and uses the results of the evaluation as the basis for improvement.

### Sources of Evidence: Examples for Standard III

Listed below are examples of potential sources of evidence for Standard III. There may be many other sources which institutions should provide and teams should ask for.

## Standard III: Resources

### A. Human Resources

- Evidence about how the institution determines human resource needs of DE/CE programs and services.
- Evidence that the institution has a reasonable means for deciding what employee qualifications are needed for positions aimed at teaching distance education and/or correspondence courses.
- Evidence that the practices that the institution uses to decide that an applicant is well qualified to teach distance education and/or correspondence courses.
- Evidence that personnel evaluation includes issues related to on-line teaching and that the institution uses the results of personnel evaluation for improvement.
- Evidence that the institution evaluates the effectiveness in producing student learning outcomes of teachers, tutors, and others involved in the distance education and/correspondence education teaching-learning process.
- Evidence that that staff development has supported faculty performance in developing and assessing student learning outcomes in DE/CE mode.

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## Standard III: Resources

### A. Human Resources (*continued*)

- Evidence that the institution applies an ethics document or documents for all personnel that appropriately takes aspects of teaching in distance education and correspondence education mode into consideration.
- Evidence about how the institution uses identified teaching and learning needs to determine professional development opportunities for faculty involved in on-line DE/CE.

## Standard III: Resources

### B. Physical Resources

- List of sites where the institution offers 50% or more of a program by DE/CE\*.
- Evidence that the institution provides adequate facilities and equipment for its distance education programs and services.
- Evidence that equipment supports the needs of the distance and correspondence modes of delivery the college offers.
- Evidence that the institution has considered the cost related to the maintenance and sustainability of its DE/CE offerings when making decisions about facilities and equipment.
- Evidence that the institution has replacement and maintenance plans for equipment that include the replacement and maintenance of equipment for on-line teaching and services.
- Evidence that the institution uses its facilities and equipment, including those related to DE/CE effectively.

## Standard III: Resources

### C. Technology Resources

- Evidence about how the institution evaluates how well its technology meets the needs of its DE/CE programs and services.

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\* These sites are considered additional learning sites and may be subject to a visit by the evaluation team according to U.S.D.E regulations.

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## Standard III: Resources

### C. Technology Resources (*continued*)

- Evidence about how the institution makes decisions about the needs of technology services, facilities, hardware, and software related to DE/CE programs.
- Evidence about how the institution evaluates the effectiveness of its technology and ensures that the technology used for its DE/CE offerings is up-to-date.
- Evidence that the institution assesses the need for information technology training for students and personnel involved in distance education.
- Evidence that training is designed to meet the needs of students and personnel involved in DE/CE.
- Evidence that the training is provided in a format that best suits the need of students and personnel involved in DE/CE.
- Evidence that sufficient and timely support is provided to personnel and students.
- Data on the use of the technology support provided by the institution.
- Evidence that the institution bases its technology plans taking the needs of distance education and/or correspondence programs and services into account.
- Evidence about how the institution includes the needs related to on-line teaching in the assessment of the technology needs of its programs and services.
- Evidence that technology resource decisions related to on-line teaching are based on the results of evaluation of program and service needs.

## Standard III: Resources

### D. Financial Resources

- Copies of the institution's costs or a separate budget for DE/CE.
- Evidence that fiscal planning takes into consideration the short-term as well as long-term investment needs related to the teaching through electronic means.
- Evidence of appropriate control mechanisms for external contracts for the provision of technology and/or support needed for DE/CE.

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## Standard IV: Leadership and Governance

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**T**he institution recognizes and utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization for continuous improvement of the institution. Governance roles are designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness, while acknowledging the designated responsibilities of the governing board and the chief administrator.

### A. Decision-Making Roles and Processes

The institution recognizes that ethical and effective leadership throughout the organization enables the institution to identify institutional values, set and achieve goals, learn, and improve.

1. Institutional leaders create an environment for empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence. They encourage staff, faculty, administrators, and students, no matter what their official titles, to take initiative in improving the practices, programs, and services in which they are involved. When ideas for improvement have policy or significant institution-wide implications, systematic participative processes are used to assure effective discussion, planning, and implementation.
2. The institution establishes and implements a written policy providing for faculty, staff, administrator, and student participation in decision-making processes. The policy specifies the manner in which individuals bring forward ideas from their constituencies and work together on appropriate policy, planning, and special-purpose bodies.
  - a. Faculty and administrators have a substantive and clearly defined role in institutional governance and exercise a substantial voice in institutional policies, planning, and budget that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. Students and staff also have established mechanisms or organizations for providing input into institutional decisions.
  - b. The institution relies on faculty, its academic senate or other appropriate faculty structures, the curriculum committee, and academic administrators for recommendations about student learning programs and services.
3. Through established governance structures, processes, and practices, the governing board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students work together for the good of the institution. These processes facilitate discussion of ideas and effective communication among the institution's constituencies.
  - Do the written policies on governance procedures specify appropriate roles for all staff and students, including opportunities for students enrolled in DE/CE? How can these roles practically be performed?

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- Are DE/CE students well informed of their respective roles?
  - Is there effective, clear communication at the college - clearly understood, widely available, current communication - that takes into consideration the needs of students enrolled in DE/CE courses or programs?
4. The institution advocates and demonstrates honesty and integrity in its relationships with external agencies. It agrees to comply with Accrediting Commission standards, policies, and guidelines, and Commission requirements for public disclosure, self study and other reports, team visits, and prior approval of substantive changes. The institution moves expeditiously to respond to recommendations made by the Commission.
  5. The role of leadership and the institution's governance and decision-making structures and processes are regularly evaluated to assure their integrity and effectiveness. The institution widely communicates the results of these evaluations and uses them as the basis for improvement.

## **B. Board and Administrative Organization**

**In addition to the leadership of individuals and constituencies, institutions recognize the designated responsibilities of the governing board for setting policies and of the chief administrator for the effective operation of the institution. Multi-college districts/systems clearly define the organizational roles of the district/system and the colleges.<sup>6</sup>**

1. The institution has a governing board that is responsible for establishing policies to assure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the student learning programs and services and the financial stability of the institution. The governing board adheres to a clearly defined policy for selecting and evaluating the chief administrator for the college or the district/system.
  - Does the institution have a Policy Manual or other policy documents that show the board's role in establishing said policy, including policies on DE/CE and reviewing it on a regular basis?
  - What statements about quality of program, integrity of institutional actions, and about effectiveness of student learning programs and services are to be found in the institution's board-established policies, mission statement, vision or philosophy statement, planning documents, or other statements of direction? Do these statements appropriately include issues related to the institution's DE/CE activities?
    - a. The governing board is an independent policy-making body that reflects the public interest in board activities and decisions. Once the board reaches a decision, it acts as a whole. It advocates for and defends the institution and protects it from undue influence or pressure.

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- b. The governing board establishes policies consistent with the mission statement to ensure the quality, integrity, and improvement of student learning programs and services and the resources necessary to support them.
  - c. The governing board has ultimate responsibility for educational quality, legal matters, and financial integrity.
  - d. The institution or the governing board publishes the board bylaws and policies specifying the board's size, duties, responsibilities, structure, and operating procedures.
  - e. The governing board acts in a manner consistent with its policies and bylaws. The board regularly evaluates its policies and practices and revises them as necessary.
  - f. The governing board has a program for board development and new member orientation. It has a mechanism for providing for continuity of board membership and staggered terms of office.
  - g. The governing board's self-evaluation processes for assessing board performance are clearly defined, implemented, and published in its policies or bylaws.
  - h. The governing board has a code of ethics that includes a clearly defined policy for dealing with behavior that violates its code.
  - i. The governing board is informed about and involved in the accreditation process.
  - j. The governing board has the responsibility for selecting and evaluating the district/system chief administrator (most often known as the chancellor) in a multi-college district/system or the college chief administrator (most often known as the president) in the case of a single college. The governing board delegates full responsibility and authority to him/her to implement and administer board policies without board interference and holds him/her accountable for the operation of the district/system or college, respectively. In multi-college districts/systems, the governing board establishes a clearly defined policy for selecting and evaluating the presidents of the colleges.
2. The president has primary responsibility for the quality of the institution he/she leads. He/she provides effective leadership in planning, organizing, budgeting, selecting and developing personnel, and assessing institutional effectiveness.
- a. The president plans, oversees, and evaluates an administrative structure organized and staffed to reflect the institution's purposes, size, and complexity. He/she delegates authority to administrators and others consistent with their responsibilities, as appropriate.
  - b. The president guides institutional improvement of the teaching and learning environment by the following:

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1. establishing a collegial process that sets values, goals, and priorities;
  2. ensuring that evaluation and planning rely on high quality research and analysis on external and internal conditions;
  3. ensuring that educational planning is integrated with resource planning and distribution to achieve student learning outcomes; and
  4. establishing procedures to evaluate overall institutional planning and implementation efforts.
- c. The president assures the implementation of statutes, regulations, and governing board policies and assures that institutional practices are consistent with institutional mission and policies.
  - d. The president effectively controls budget and expenditures.
  - e. The president works and communicates effectively with the communities served by the institution.
3. In multi-college districts or systems, the district/system provides primary leadership in setting and communicating expectations of educational excellence and integrity throughout the district/system and assures support for the effective operation of the colleges. It establishes clearly defined roles of authority and responsibility between the colleges and the district/system and acts as the liaison between the colleges and the governing board.<sup>6</sup>
    - a. The district/system clearly delineates and communicates the operational responsibilities and functions of the district/system from those of the colleges and consistently adheres to this delineation in practice.
    - b. The district/system provides effective services that support the colleges in their missions and functions.
    - c. The district/system provides fair distribution of resources that are adequate to support the effective operations of the colleges.
    - d. The district/system effectively controls its expenditures.
    - e. The chancellor gives full responsibility and authority to the presidents of the colleges to implement and administer delegated district/system policies without his/her interference and holds them accountable for the operation of the colleges.
    - f. The district/system acts as the liaison between the colleges and the governing board. The district/system and the colleges use effective methods of communication, and they exchange information in a timely manner.
    - g. The district/system regularly evaluates district/system role delineation and governance and decision-making structures and processes to assure their integrity and effectiveness in assisting the colleges in meeting educational goals. The district/system widely communicates the results of these evaluations and uses them as the basis for improvement.

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## Sources of Evidence: Examples for Standard IV

Listed below are examples of potential sources of evidence for Standard IV. There may be many other sources which institutions should provide and teams should ask for.

## Standard IV: Leadership and Governance

### A. Decision-Making Roles and Processes

- Evidence that includes copies of governance policies and procedures, the composition of governance bodies, minutes of meetings, and documents showing the roles relevant faculty play in reviewing and planning student learning including in distance education and correspondence education programs and services.
- Evidence that the governance structures, processes and practices include opportunities for staff, faculty and students involved in DE/CE to provide input to the development of the institution.

### B. Board and Administrative Organization

- Evidence that the board has taken the quality of the institution's DE/CE into consideration in the development of the relevant policies.
- Examples of board statements on DE/CE program quality and integrity.

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## Policies Referenced in the Commission Standards

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<sup>1</sup>Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education

<sup>2</sup>Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals

<sup>3</sup>Policy on Closing an Institution

<sup>4</sup>Policy on Transfer of Credit  
Policy on Award of Credit

<sup>5</sup>Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations

<sup>6</sup>Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts and Systems

<sup>7</sup>Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, Representation of Accredited Status

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES**  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education**

(Adopted June 2001, Edited August 2004, Revised June 2005, Revised January 2010)

### **Background**

Recognizing that most institutions must make use of the growing range of systems for delivery of instruction, including various electronic means, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has adopted a policy based on principles of good practice to help ensure that distance learning is characterized by the same concerns for quality, integrity, and effectiveness that apply to more traditional modes of instruction.

As methods used to facilitate/conduct distance learning evolve, the ACCJC policies that address distance learning also change. This policy statement has drawn from several previous policies and is intended to replace those policies with a single, unified, and up-to-date statement. Further development of this policy may well be appropriate in the not-so-distant future.

### **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

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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) That 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. "<sup>1</sup>

### **Policy**

ACCJC policy specifies that all learning opportunities provided by our accredited institutions have the same quality, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, whether they are delivered electronically or by more traditional means. The intent of the policy is to provide a framework that allows institutions the flexibility to adapt their delivery modes to the emerging needs of students and society while maintaining quality. Any institution offering courses and programs electronically is expected to meet the requirements of accreditation in each of its courses and programs and at each of its sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Language is from the Federal Register 8/6/2009

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## Policy Elements

- Development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education, must take place within the institution's total educational mission.
- Institutions are expected to control development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs offered in their names, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education.
- Institutions are expected to have clearly defined and appropriate student learning outcomes for all courses and programs, including those delivered through distance education or correspondence education.
- Institutions are expected to provide the resources and structure needed to accomplish these outcomes.
- Institutions are expected to demonstrate that their students achieve these outcomes through application of rigorous assessment.
- Institutions are expected to provide the ACCJC reasons to believe that these outcomes will continue to be accomplished.
- Institutions are expected to provide the ACCJC advance notice of intent to initiate a new delivery mode, such as distance education or correspondence education, through the Substantive Change process.
- Institutions are expected to provide the ACCJC advance notice of intent to offer a program in which 50% or more of the courses are via distance education or correspondence education, through the Substantive Change process.
- Institutions which offer distance education or correspondence education have processes in place through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence course or program is the same person who participates every time in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. This requirement will be met if the institution verifies the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the institution's discretion, such methods as a secure log-in and password, proctored examinations, and/or new or other technologies and/or practices that are developed and effective in verifying each student's identification. The institution must also publish to their students, policies that ensure the protection of student privacy and will notify students at the time of class registration of any charges associated with verification of student identity.