

Distance Education Review Guide

Effective October 1, 2013

Under federal regulations, WSCUC is required to demonstrate that distance education programs are reviewed during the comprehensive accreditation/reaffirmation process.

The WSCUC Standards of Accreditation apply to the review of all distance education programs. Considerable attention should be given to Standards 2, 3, and 4 when evaluating these programs. To ensure that each team is reviewing distance education programs in a consistent manner, WSCUC has developed this guide that details specific elements to be included in upcoming reviews.

In keeping with federal policy, WSCUC requires institutions that offer distance education to have processes in place through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. To meet this requirement, the institution must employ, at its option, methods to verify the student who participates, such as:

- A secure login and pass code
- Proctored examinations
- New or other technologies or practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

In so doing, the institution must make clear in writing at the time of enrollment or registration that it uses processes that protect student privacy and notifies students of any projected additional charges associated with the verification of student identity.

Prior to the Offsite Review (OSR)

- From the information provided by the institution, identify the number and types of distance education programs offered.
- Review any previous visit team reports, commission action letters, substantive change action letters and interim report action reports to determine if issues regarding distance education programs have been identified for attention during this review.
- Review the institutional report for information provided on distance education programs. If additional information is needed, identify that information at the time of the pre-OSR team conference call.
- Develop questions to be pursued with the institution. For example:
 - How are timely and appropriate interactions ensured between students and faculty and among students? (CFR 2.5)
 - How is the student's ability to succeed in distance education programs addressed and
 - How has the institution established that student learning resources and support services online are consistent with the learning environment provided at the home campus? (CFR 2.13)

- Is the institution's technical capacity appropriate to effectively support teaching and learning? What is the impact of distance education support on the information technology infrastructure of the institution, such as on servers and technical support? (CFR 3.5 and Interregional Guidelines)
- What evaluations have been conducted comparing the educational effectiveness of distance education programs with campus-based programs (including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction) to ensure comparability, if applicable? (CFR 4.3, 4.4)

During the OSR and Accreditation Visit

- Evaluate the quality and level of the institution's development in support of distance education programs in terms of the following (Standard 3):
 - Resources (financial, technological)
 - Structures and processes, including those for assessing student learning outcomes
 - Faculty and staff qualifications, training, and support
 - Student support services
 - Process for student verification
- Assess the educational effectiveness of distance education programs, including evidence of the achievement of the stated learning outcomes for the program (Standard 4):
 - Learning outcomes
 - Assessment results
 - Student advising and support
 - Effectiveness of the quality assurance process for distance education program

Created, May 2014

Revised, April 2018