



Policy Title: ACAOM Distance Education Policy

Approved By: ACAOM Executive Committee

Document History: Implementation Date: 17 October 2015

Last Updated: 14 January 2019

Related Policies: [ACAOM Notification of Change Policy](#); [ACAOM Fees and Dues Schedule](#); [ACAOM Glossary](#); [ACAOM Accreditation Procedures](#); [ACAOM Standards and Criteria for Accreditation](#)

References: [34 CFR Part 602](#); [20 U.S. Code § 1099\(b\)](#)

Responsible Official: ACAOM Executive Director

Policy Summary: This policy outlines ACAOM critical elements, requirements, and definitions relating to distance education.

Table of Contents

- 1. Definitions..... 1
- 2. Distance Education Substantive Change 2
- 3. Distance Education Critical Elements 3
- 4. Verification of Student Identity 3
- 5. Distance Education Guidelines 4
 - A. The institution must:..... 4
 - B. The distance education course or program must provide: 4
 - C. The students must have:..... 4
 - D. Ongoing systematic evaluations are planned and organized to assess:..... 4

1. Definitions

Blended (also called Hybrid) Classroom Course

Online activity is mixed with classroom meetings, replacing a significant percentage (defined by ACAOM as < 50%), but not all required face-to-face instructional activities. When the technologies used for education and communication outside the classroom are used to supplant some, but not all face-to-face instruction, reducing the

time actually spent in the classroom, the result is a blended/hybrid classroom course. For example, if a course traditionally meets in a classroom three times per week, a blended/hybrid version might use online sessions to replace one or two of the traditional weekly classroom sessions, or to focus face-to-face sessions on laboratory, or project work. The offering institution should set the threshold for required online activity at that institution.

Classroom Course

Course activity is organized around scheduled class meetings. Traditional classroom courses are measured by the number of hours spent in required in-person class meetings in various formats (as defined by credit and contact hour requirements), such as lectures, studios, or workshops or other traditional face-to-face activities, such as laboratories, field trips, or internships. Such courses may involve some sort of computer usage, but the course is still anchored to the normal time spent in face-to-face classes. For the purposes of clarity in these definitions, courses that use technology at this level are considered to be “classroom” courses.

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.

Distance (or Distance-Delivered or Online) Education

An educational process in which the majority of instruction ($\geq 50\%$ of the classroom contact hours in a course) occurs when a student and instructor are not in the same place, and includes technology that is **used to support regular and substantive interactions between the instructor and the students**. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ the following technologies: (1) the internet; (2) one-way and two-way transmission through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communication devices; (3) audio conferencing. Distance education may employ video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if these modalities are used in a course in conjunction with any of the previous three technologies [34 CFR 602.3]. No “hands-on” practical portion of any laboratory or clinic-based courses within a degree program may be taught online. *[Emphasis added]*

Distance-delivered/online courses are distinguished from blended/hybrid courses in which some classroom contact hours have been replaced by online learning.

Online Course

All course activity is done online. There are no required face-to-face sessions within the course and no requirements for on-campus activity. Purely online courses totally eliminate geography as a factor in the relationship between the student and the institution. They consist entirely of online elements that facilitate the three critical student interactions: with content, the instructor, and other students.

2. Distance Education Substantive Change

When an institution plans to implement its first distance education course(s) for an ACAOM-accredited or pre-accredited program, ACAOM must be notified at least six months prior to the planned implementation through receipt of a completed substantive change application and associated fee. (See [ACAOM Notification of Change Policy](#) and [ACAOM Fees and Dues Schedule](#)). ACAOM will review the substantive change based on the demonstrated compliance with applicable *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies, and procedures,

including those specific to distance education and elements critical to effective use of distance education methods. ACAOM approval is required prior to the implementation of the first distance education course(s).

An institution's initial approved AOM-related distance education course(s) must be offered in English. An accredited institution seeking to offer a subsequent distance education course in a language other than English, must apply for Substantive Change approval for the first course(s) in each additional language. At the present time, however, only programs offered in English are eligible for distance education approval.

Institutions/programs that receive initial approval for offering distance education course(s) will be required to complete two monitoring reports, generally scheduled at one and two years following implementation. An institution/program may incorporate requests for expansion of distance education scope within these two scheduled reports. The Commission will not accept a substantive change application for expansion of distance education scope prior to the first scheduled monitoring report. The first scheduled monitoring report may not be accelerated to serve this purpose; the report must address and assess completed course offerings, and thus cannot be significantly moved forward of the normal due date.

3. Distance Education Critical Elements

Several expectations are central to good practice in distance education in AOM courses and programs:

- A. The institution offering distance education course(s) must meet current ACAOM Standards and Criteria. The institution accepts responsibility to review educational courses and programs provided via distance education and ensure continued compliance with accreditation requirements and reporting.
- B. The institution clearly states its policies concerning the establishment, organization, funding, and management of distance education courses and programs; and there is an ongoing commitment to such courses and programs.
- C. The institution recognizes that distance education differs from traditional on-site learning in substantive ways, e.g., pedagogy, instructional media tools, assessment. Cognitive and affective skills need to be taught and assessed differently depending on the mode of delivery.
- D. The institution/program undertakes the necessary planning prior to the initial distance education course to ensure the adequacy of technical and physical plant facilities, including appropriate staffing and technical assistance to support distance education programs and courses; and that students are informed about, and have access to, the required hardware and software. Prior to starting a distance education program, the institution should also have reviewed admission and acceptance criteria to assess whether the student has the necessary background, knowledge, and technical skills needed to undertake the courses or programs.

4. Verification of Student Identity

AOM institutions/programs with one or more distance education offerings must demonstrate that processes are in place through which the institution/program establishes that the student who registers in a distance education offering is the same student who participates in, completes, and receives the academic credit for the course/program. The verification of student identity may occur through, at the option of the institution, methods such as:

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

AOM education programs with one or more distance education offerings must demonstrate that the institution uses processes that protect student privacy, and that notify students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.

5. Distance Education Guidelines

All distance education must comply with ACAOM's [Standards and Criteria for Accreditation](#) and meet the following guidelines.

A. *The institution/program must:*

- (1) Assure that distance education is consistent with the institution/program's mission and goals;
- (2) Employ and articulate sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded;
- (3) Have a process to verify the identity of students taking distance education offerings;
- (4) Have the equipment and technical expertise required for distance education; and
- (5) Have long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes that reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment, and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education offerings.

B. *The distance education course(s) must provide/employ:*

- (1) Regular and substantive faculty-initiated interaction with students; as well regular and substantive interaction among the students;
- (2) Faculty responsibility for oversight of distance education ensuring both the rigor of offerings and the quality of instruction;
- (3) Technology that is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the offerings;
- (4) Currency of materials, programs, and courses;
- (5) Policies that are clear concerning the ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, "tele-courses," or other media products;
- (6) Sufficient faculty qualified (experienced or trained) to develop, design, and teach distance education courses and programs;
- (7) Support services for faculty specifically related to distance education; and
- (8) Faculty development in instructional and technological strategies for faculty who teach in distance education course(s).

C. *The students enrolled in distance education courses must have:*

- (1) Access to the range of student services appropriate to support the program(s) and course(s), including library and information resources, admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, placement, and counseling;
- (2) Knowledge and equipment necessary to use technology employed in the course(s), and regularly available assistance when experiencing difficulty using the required technology;
- (3) Technology appropriate to the courses or program(s);
- (4) A learning orientation to effective participation in distance education; and
- (5) Means for resolving student complaints.

D. *Ongoing systematic evaluations are planned and organized to assess:*

- (1) Student capability to succeed in distance education offerings and use of the information in course and program planning;
- (2) Effectiveness of distance education offerings (including assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention and student satisfaction);

- (3) Effectiveness of distance education offerings in meeting ACAOM Accreditation Standards; and
- (4) Integrity of student work and credibility of the credits awarded.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By
161030	Refreshed and Reformatted.	ACAOM Executive Director
180306	Added or clarified definitions of <i>Distance Education</i> , <i>Classroom Course</i> , <i>Blended Classroom Course</i> and <i>Online Course</i>	ACAOM Executive Director
190114	Change to definitions, addition of language regarding monitoring reports, general editing for clarity	ACAOM Executive Director