Approvals for Distance Education Programs and Courses – Overview

The Higher Learning Commission (the agency that accredits UW-Madison) and federal regulations require that institutions have records of distance-education courses (numbers of courses, enrollment counts, credit counts), and distance-education programs (lists of programs and enrollment numbers). In addition, federal legislation requires that institutions must be able to report distance education students by their state where they are living while they are enrolled. The provisions described in this document are designed to insure that UW-Madison is able to meet these requirements. Definitions of distance education are provided at the end of this document.

Approval of Distance Courses

Courses are approved based on academic content. The mode of instructional delivery (residential, distance-delivered, or hybrid format) is not a component of the proposal for a new course.

When courses are entered in the Schedule of Classes (formerly, Timetable), the course must be labeled with the relevant “instructional mode” to accurately represent the course’s delivery mechanism. The reliable use of “instructional mode” is essential so that courses that are distance-delivered can be identified by students, and also to meet mandated reporting.

Consult the Divisional Committee Coordinator or the course approval guidelines (http://www.secfac.wisc.edu/divcomm/courses/CourseProposals.htm).

Approval of Distance Academic Programs (Degrees/Majors/Options/Certificates)

All distance education programs require institutional approval because we need a formal record of these programs for reporting to the Commission and for reporting to meet US Department of Education regulations.

Consult the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research or the academic planning web site (http://apir.wisc.edu/degreesmajorsoptions.htm).
New Degrees and Majors

If a new degree/major program is to be delivered through distance-education, then it goes through the regular new program approval process. Distance-delivery features are approved in the context of the full program approval.

Existing Degrees and Majors – Use of Options

If an existing degree/major is to be offered as a distance-education program, then a proposal must be advanced for a formal named option. The option will provide a mechanism to communicate to students the nature of the program and to allow for mandated institutional reporting on distance education programs.

Certificates

A new certificate program that will be offered as a distance-delivered program will go through the regular approval process.

For an existing certificate that will be offered as a distance-delivered program there are two approval paths.

- One path is to provide notice that the certificate is switching to a distance-deliver format. For this path, the program faculty director should submit a memo to the Director of Academic Planning and Analysis that signals this intention. The memo should include supporting documentation that shows that the department and the school/college endorse the change. The notice will be an information item on the UAPC agenda and the certificate will be recorded as a distance-delivered program in university records.
- The other path is to propose a second new certificate with the same curriculum but that will function as the distance-delivered version of the residential certificate program. This may be accomplished by writing a short proposal that addresses issues related to distance delivery and student support and appending the original proposal. The approval should go through the regular process (department approval, school/college APC, GFEC for graduate programs, and UAPC for all programs). Any level of approval may choose to expedite approval. At the UAPC such approvals will be expedited as automatic consent actions.

Definition of Distance Education

The relevant definitions are those used by the Higher Learning Commission (the agency that accredits UW-Madison) and the US Department of Education.
The Commission defines a **distance or correspondence education** program as one in which a student could earn the credential by taking 50% or more of the work associated with the program in distance or correspondence education courses. Distance or correspondence courses or credits are those in which all or the vast majority (75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other (February 2011). The definitions align our practices with federal definitions (October 2010):

**Distance education/course** means education that uses one or more of the following technologies (i) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor: and (ii) to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies used may include: (i) the internet; (ii) one way and two way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (iii) audio-conferencing; or (iv) videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the videocassettes, DVDs or CD-ROMs are used in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in clauses (i) through (iii).

**Correspondence education/course** 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 not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. (4) Correspondence education is not [necessarily] distance education.

At the current time, UW-Madison has no recorded correspondence education. If readers of this document know such activity exists, it must be reported to the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research.

**Questions**

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