



## Approvals for Distance Education Programs and Courses

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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, “state authorization” laws in most states require 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.

### 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 to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and 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 limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. (4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

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

### **Approval of Distance Courses**

Courses are approved based on academic content. The mode of instructional delivery (classroom instruction, online/some classroom, distance-delivered) is not currently a component of the proposal for a new course.

When courses are entered in the Schedule of Classes (formerly, *Timetable*), each course-section 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. Currently, there are three instructional modes:

Classroom Instruction – Course section is not a Distance Education course-section (ISIS code: P; CDR code: N)

Online/Some Classroom – Course section is a partially Distance Education course-section. Seventy-five percent (75%) or more of the section is delivered via distance learning technology, but at least one class session is on campus (ISIS code: WC; CDR code: P)

Online only – Course section is totally Distance Education course-section. Section is totally (100%) delivered via distance learning technology, no campus visits are required (ISIS code: WO; CDR code: T)

For questions about the course proposal process, contact the Academic Planning and Institutional Research ([courseproposal@provost.wisc.edu](mailto:courseproposal@provost.wisc.edu)) or see the course approval guidelines (<http://www.apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm>).

For information about how to use the “instructional mode”, contact Curricular Services, Office of the Registrar ([http://registrar.wisc.edu/classroom\\_scheduling.htm](http://registrar.wisc.edu/classroom_scheduling.htm)).

Currently (Fall 2015) no special approval is required to offer a course in any of the available “instructional modes.” Courses offered in any instructional mode must meet standards for delivery including sufficient staffing, support services, access to appropriate laboratory and library resources, and processes for ongoing planning, evaluation and improvement.

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

All distance-delivered programs require institutional approval. A formal record of these programs is required for reporting to the UW System Administration, the Higher Learning Commission, and 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

If an existing degree/major is to be offered as a distance-education program in addition to being offered in a traditional, residential format, 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. It will also allow us to identify the students separately from those in the traditional residential program and thus meet mandated institutional reporting on distance education programs.

For information on proposals for named options, see <http://apir.wisc.edu/degreesmajorsoptions.htm>.

If an existing degree/major (or named option of a degree/major) is to be fully converted to a distance-delivered format and no longer offered as a traditional, residential format, this change must also go through a formal approval process. The program faculty prepare a proposal document that describes this intention and the preparations the program has made to maintain program quality. The document is formally approved by the program faculty or department, the school/college APC and/or dean’s office, and forwarded to the Office of the Provost with a supporting cover memo from the dean. The proposal will be considered by the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC).

Proposals for graduate programs will be routed through the Graduate School and the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC), and will be approved by the UAPC (usually as automatic consent agenda items)

### Certificates

A new certificate program that will be offered as a distance-delivered program or a certificate that is changing entirely to distance-delivery should complete the certificate proposal form and go through the regular approval process. For proposals for a change in delivery mode by existing certificates, the expectation is that the approval will be straightforward and focused on considerations associated with delivering a quality program in the new mode of delivery.

For additional information on certificates, see <http://apir.wisc.edu/certificates.htm>

### Compliance with Program Review Requirements

Note that UW-Madison faculty policy as well as System/Regent policy and accreditation criteria, require regular program review, including a review of new programs at the five year mark and after that review of academic programs at least once every ten years. Units proposing new programs will need to be up-to-date on program review. Programs that are over-due for review will be required to complete a review before conversion is approved.

### **Questions**

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