

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS POLICY 2.12

DELIVERY OF DEGREE PROGRAMS THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

- **Philosophy and Principles**

The Louisiana Board of Regents supports and applauds efforts to offer distance education for the purpose of increasing instructional access for Louisiana citizens to courses and programs offered by Louisiana public higher education institutions. All credit offerings delivered through distance education must be appropriate to the role, scope, and mission of the institution as defined by Board of Regents. Criteria for approval of academic programs are based on qualitative consideration of the highest order. All state institutions of higher education offering distance education must either meet requirements or be accepted for candidacy by the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or the Commission on Occupational Education (COE). All institutions should be guided by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education Principles.

- **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to increase access to educational opportunities and to ensure quality of instruction through distance education to place- and time-bound students; enhance the ability of campuses to respond to learner needs; increase educational opportunities and encourage linkages between Louisiana educational institutions and other sectors including business, government, and the surrounding community; provide cost-effective service through cooperative development; invest in and support the development of a telecommunications infrastructure; and minimize and streamline policies for reviewing and approving flexible degree programs offered through distance education technology.

- **Definition of Terms**

The term **Degree Program** is defined in Academic Affairs Policy 2.11. Additional terminology relevant to this policy are defined below:

Distance Education is the formal education process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance Education technology is generally synonymous with mediated instruction (such as compressed video, videotape, CD-ROM, Internet, audio, audiographics, satellite, microwave, or ITFS). This policy does not regulate computer and electronically augmented traditional campus instruction or print media.

Branch Campus is defined by federal regulations as:

- a location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. A location is independent of the main campus if the location is (1) permanent in nature, (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential, (3) had its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization, (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority; or

- any location of an institution other than the main campus, at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.

Campuses are advised to also seek further clarification of this term as prescribed by either COC or COE accreditation regulations.

Off-Campus Learning Centers are similar to branch campuses in that they are geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution, permanent in nature, and offer courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential. One or more institutions may participate in these offerings through contractual or consortial arrangements.

- **Policy**

This policy applies to Louisiana institutions authorized by the Louisiana Board of Regents to offer post-secondary degree or certification programs. While off-campus credit courses offered through distance education must be reported to the Board of Regents as required for data collection, coordination of program, and informational purposes, Regents approval is not required for courses to be delivered via distance education technologies. The Board of Regents reserves the right to mediate in instances where distance education coursework becomes unnecessarily duplicative.

Specifically, the policy applies to all degree or certification programs that are offered primarily through distance education technology. Only COC and COE accredited institutions will be considered for approval to offer distance education programs. Those institutions which have been accepted for candidacy by either COC or COE may be considered for approval to offer distance education coursework.

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Regents approval is required to electronically extend existing campus-based academic programs if 1) courses are offered in such a manner or at a location that an individual student can take 50 percent or more of the courses for the degree, or 2) the program is advertised as available in distance education technologies.

If the Degree Program is Currently Approved by the Board of Regents: If the degree program is currently approved by the Board of Regents and if 50% or more of required coursework of a degree program will be delivered through distance education technology, the institution must request approval to deliver the program from the Board of Regents and follow COC or COE policies and standards pertaining to distance education. Required procedures for this type of request are given below:

- First, the affected college or university shall submit through its management board to the Deputy or Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs a completed Request for Authority to Offer an Existing Academic Program Through Distance Education Technologies. Institutions shall not apply for COC or COE approval until the Board of Regents or its staff has rendered a decision whether the Request meets concerns and requirements of the Regents.

- If the Board of Regents or its staff grants approval for the Request, the affected college or university must then seek approval for a substantive change from either COC or COE, as appropriate.
- Upon receipt of COC's or COE's judgment, copies of all COC or COE correspondence regarding its decision must then be sent to the Deputy or Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs. If COC or COE grants approval, the college/university is automatically authorized to begin program implementation. If COC or COE does not grant approval, the program may not be implemented and a new request must be submitted to the Regents before reconsideration.

For the purposes of authorizing distance education arrangements for existing degree programs, the Board of Regents will consider program duplication as a critical factor.

- **If the Degree Program Is Not Currently Approved by the Board of Regents:** If the degree program is not currently approved by the Board of Regents, then existing Regents policies and procedures for developing new academic programs must be followed (see Academic Affairs Policies and Procedures 2.4, 2.5, and 2.11).
- Institutions must report students enrolling in courses and programs delivered via distance education technologies.
- Institutions shall ensure compliance with all applicable copyright laws concerning the use and transmission of films, videotapes, recording, or other protected works.
- Institutions shall ensure compliance with all applicable policies regulating intellectual property.
- The Board of Regents supports the position that institutions should be able to establish separate fees to cover the costs associated with electronic delivery of credit and non-credit instruction. Fees should be consistent with management board policies and state legislation. The Board of Regents will provide guidance for the establishment of fees for electronic delivery of instruction, and reserves the right to review established fee structures, and policies governing establishment of such fees.
- All courses and programs offered through distance education will not be subject to service area limitations, with the exception of specific Regents mandates (e.g., duplicated programs, programs provided by the desegregation Settlement Agreement, etc.)
- Each institution will have a single point of contact for reporting and responding to Distance Education issues and activities. It is the responsibility of each institution to make sure that the Board of Regents is notified of this point of contact.
- Upon approval, this policy supersedes any and all pre-existing Board of Regents policies, procedures, guidelines, and/or regulations governing the delivery of instruction through distance education technologies. This includes, but is not limited to Board of Regents Policy On Telecommunications, section 4.04.01-4.04.04, Board of Regents Policy and Procedures Manual, and applicable sections of the Board of Regents Policy 4.2, Mandatory Guidelines for the Conduct of Off-Campus Activities