

PROPOSED CHANGES

Key: Deleted, Added

Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns

The Commission provides for various forms of learning in which education is offered apart from the main campus.

- (1) Branch campuses
- (2) Additional locations
- (3) Extension sites and extension classes
- (4) Distance education
- (5) Correspondence education

Residential education has been the typical means of instruction due to the added values, and immediate resources of the main campus and the interaction with the institution's local community. Institutions with adequate resources may extend their influence beyond the main campus by using alternative academic patterns to meet the needs of the general public, to deliver instruction to constituencies unable to attend courses on the main campus, to allow students to benefit from educational experiences in the context of life and ministry, and to provide continuing education for program graduates. Alternative academic patterns may be either for credit (supportive of a certificate or degree) or noncredit (popular level). All alternative patterns should be under the direct control of the institution's administration.

Definitions

Branch Campus:

A branch campus is a geographically separate unit, independent of the main campus, with its own core facilities, curricula, faculty, administrative or supervisory personnel, and instructional resources. General oversight is provided by the parent institution. A branch campus (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers academic programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized credential; and (3) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Additional Location:

Additional locations are locations other than the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.

Extension Site:

Extension sites are locations away from the main campus at which the institution offers less than 50% of an educational program.

Distance education. Distance education is defined as education that uses one or more 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, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the other technologies listed.

Correspondence education. Correspondence education is defined as 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. The interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education. Note: Correspondence education is not within ABHE's scope of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

A. General Policies

1. Alternative academic patterns are an extension of the parent institution and, hence, come under the institutional, or where applicable, programmatic accrediting jurisdiction of the Commission. Institutions wishing to initiate alternative academic patterns should refer to the Policy on Substantive Change. Each initiative is considered individually and, once approved, becomes part of the institution's regular reporting and evaluation cycle. Accordingly, any branch campus or additional location may be visited by an evaluating team or Commission staff representative as part of the institution's reaffirmation process.
2. Initially, the establishment of 50% or more of a program through an alternative academic pattern will be considered a major substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. A comprehensive written proposal addressing the alternative academic pattern's compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and this Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns is required. Specifically, the plan should identify the purpose, objectives, resources, methods of implementation, and means of implementation for each alternative academic pattern adopted (branch campus, additional location, extension class, distance education, or correspondence education). Materials must include a business plan that includes statements of projected cash flow, and of revenues and expenditures. Details regarding the different academic patterns are found at the end of this document.
3. After the establishment of an alternative academic pattern, changes that depart significantly from the approved offerings must be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change.
4. When an institution initially proposes to establish an alternative academic pattern utilizing a branch campus or an additional location, a special visit is required in order to assess the branch or additional location with respect to the Commission's Comprehensive Integrated Standards for Accreditation and this Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns. Representatives of the Commission will visit the location within six months of its establishment. Special attention will be given to the design of curricular offerings, the validity of any credentials awarded, the adequacy of financial support, instructional resources, administrative oversight, and the impact of the added location upon the parent institution.
5. Alternative academic patterns must be consistent with the institution's mission and be limited to those subject areas for which the parent institution has expertise.
6. Alternative academic patterns must be offered in conformity with applicable state or provincial law.

7. Alternative academic patterns must contribute to the parent institution's quality and integrity. For-credit courses must be applicable toward one of the institution's degree programs and must be commensurate in quality with regular on-campus offerings. A course offered via multiple modalities must reflect similar content and student learning outcomes across delivery modes.
8. Alternative academic patterns must not adversely affect the institution's administrative effectiveness, result in faculty overload, or cause financial stress or instability. Alternative academic patterns must be controlled by the parent institution to ensure sound business practices, adequate financial support, quality instruction, and accurate promotion.
9. Alternative academic pattern courses must be systematically evaluated to determine if course objectives are being met and outcomes documented to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. Records that deal with academic and other matters must be maintained and safeguarded by the parent institution.
10. The qualifications of alternative academic pattern faculty must be commensurate with those of on-campus faculty.
11. Faculty involved in the development and implementation of offerings using alternative academic patterns must be provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness.
12. Adequate instructional and technical support, facilities, supplies, library, and other resources that support the classes taken must be provided in alternative academic patterns.
13. Admissions standards must be the same for all students whether they study on campus or in an alternative academic pattern. Safeguards are in place to confirm the identity of enrolled students. The safeguards must ensure that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. At the time of enrollment, the institution will notify students of any projected additional financial charges associated with the verification of their identity.
14. Adequate student support services, such as admissions, financial aid, academic and personal counseling, registration, and oversight must be provided for all approved alternative academic pattern locations. Processes must be in place to protect the privacy of the student's personal information.
15. Steps are taken to establish long-term relationships with the students at the alternative academic pattern locations so that they become members of the institution's learning community.
16. Personnel providing services to students employing alternative academic patterns are provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness in meeting student needs.
17. The use of alternative academic patterns is continued for a period long enough to enable admitted students to complete their credential within a publicized timeframe.
18. Students considering enrollment in programs employing alternative academic patterns are fully informed regarding technologies to be used, program costs, financial aid available, time frames available for program completion, learning resources available, support services available, means

available for interaction with faculty and other students, and any other matters which may affect their success in the program.

19. Credentials should be awarded only to alternative academic pattern students who complete a planned program consistent with institutional mission and program objectives.
20. The curricula, instruction, awarding of credit, and conferral of degrees or diplomas must remain under the control of the institution's faculty and administration.
21. When a degree or diploma is offered through alternative academic patterns, the institution must ensure that the students fulfill ministry formation requirements.
22. When alternative academic patterns are offered, the institution or program must provide for the proper evaluation of the student's progress and for guidance regarding future work.

B. Special Policies for Branch Campuses

1. The establishment or relocation of a branch campus will be considered a ~~major~~ substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. A change of physical location for an established branch campus is considered a relocation. A comprehensive written proposal addressing the branch campus's compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and this Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns is required. The substantive change proposal must include a business plan for the branch campus consisting of the following: (1) The educational program to be offered at the branch campus; (2) the projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flows at the branch campus; and (3) the operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus. This procedure must be followed for each branch campus established, and an evaluation visit by a Commission staff representative must be completed within six months of implementation.
2. A branch campus is responsible for maintaining its own core facilities, curricula, faculty, administrative or supervisory personnel, and instructional resources at a level that demonstrates compliance with the ABHE Standards. Appropriate documents should specify organizational and administrative relationships between the branch campus and the parent institution.
3. Institutions operating a branch campus will be responsible to maintain evidence that the quality of education at the branch campus is maintained through:
 - a. Clearly identified academic control;
 - b. Regular evaluation of the branch campus;
 - c. Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems;
 - d. Financial stability; and
 - e. Long-range planning for expansion.
4. Degrees, certificates, or other credentials that are based chiefly upon credits earned at a branch campus must indicate that they were earned at the branch campus.
5. The discontinuation of a branch campus is a ~~major~~ substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. A teach-out plan must be provided when closing a branch campus.

C. Special Policies for Additional Locations

1. The establishment or relocation of an additional location will be considered a ~~major~~ substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. A change of physical location for an established additional location is considered a relocation. An institution is required, prior to implementation, to submit for COA approval a comprehensive written proposal addressing the additional location's compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and this Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns. The substantive change proposal must include a business plan for the additional location consisting of the following: (1) the educational program to be offered at the additional location; (2) the projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flows at the additional location; and (3) the operation, management, and physical resources at the additional location. This procedure must be followed for at least the first three additional locations established, and an evaluation visit by a Commission staff representative must be completed within six months of implementation. *The procedure must be followed for all other additional locations unless a pre-approval waiver has been granted.*
2. An additional location must be under the administrative and legal control of the parent institution's president and board. Appropriate documents should specify organizational and administrative relationships between the additional location and the parent institution.
- ~~3. Degrees or diplomas that are based chiefly upon credits earned at an additional location must indicate that they were earned at the additional location.~~
- 4 3. The Commission may, under certain conditions, waive an institution's pre-approval requirements relative to establishing or relocating an additional location where the institution has previously hosted successful site visits to at least three additional locations. In general, such a waiver is granted on the basis of the Commission's review of evidence that the institution has established a system to assure quality across a distributed enterprise. Specifically, an institution wishing a waiver of individual additional location approvals must submit evidence of the following in the substantive change request for each additional location established under a pre-approval waiver:
 - a. Clearly identified academic control relative to additional locations;
 - b. A system of data collection and regular evaluation to ensure comparability of educational quality at all additional locations;
 - c. Written policies, criteria, and monitoring data to ensure adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems for all additional locations;
 - d. Fiscal strength and financial stability as reflected in the institution's composite Financial Stability Factor score; and
 - e. Comprehensive long-range planning for maintenance and expansion of additional locations.

Pre-approval waivers relative to additional locations will be reviewed by the Commission at least every five years. At the time of the five-year review, site visits to a representative sample of not less than 25% of additional locations operated under the waiver will be required. Pre-approval waivers will be suspended in cases where an institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change in control, unless and until such time as the Commission re-determines that the institution continues to meet the conditions for the pre-approval of additional locations.

- 5 4. Preapproval waivers are not applicable to additional locations under the following circumstances:
- a new degree program is offered
 - state/provincial boundaries are crossed
 - establishment of the additional location requires the development of substantial new faculty and learning resources
 - the ownership of the institution changes
 - the institution acquires an institution, program, or location of another institution
 - the institution adds a permanent location at a site where it is conducting a "teach-out" for students of another institution that ceased operating before all students completed their program of study
- 6 5. Institutions that are not eligible for a pre-approval waiver or do not seek a pre-approval waiver, must host a site visit within six months of establishment of any new additional location.
6. Institutions that have a pre-approval waiver and establish five or more additional locations in a single academic year (July-June) must host a site visit to a representative sample of 25% of these additional locations within six months of the establishment of the fifth additional location.
7. In all cases, institutions operating (an) additional location(s) will be responsible to maintain evidence that they are ensuring the quality of education at their additional location(s) through:
- a. Clearly identified academic control
 - b. Regular evaluation of the location
 - c. Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems
 - d. Financial stability
 - e. Long-range planning for expansion
8. In all cases, ABHE will conduct site visits to a representative sample of at least 25% of an institution's additional locations during an accreditation cycle. At the discretion of the Commission, additional visits may be required to verify compliance with the standards.

D. Special Policies for Extension Sites

1. The establishment of an extension site will be considered a ~~major-substantive~~ notification change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. ~~After the successful establishment of the first extension site, a category "A" (mature) institution can treat subsequent locations as minor substantive changes except where a new degree program is offered, state/provincial boundaries are crossed or the new location requires the development of substantial new faculty and learning resources. In such instances, a new location must be treated as a major change. Visits will be held at the discretion of the Commission.~~
2. An extension site must be under the administrative and legal control of the parent institution's president and board. Appropriate documents should specify organizational and administrative relationships between the extension site and the parent institution.

E. Special Policies for Distance Education

1. The establishment of distance education studies by the institution will require compliance with the Policy on Substantive Change.
 - a. Institutions must ~~apply for a major substantive change to initiate online instruction~~ notify the Commission prior to initiating online or hybrid courses (partially online).
 - b. An institution having approval to use the online instructional modality must apply for a ~~major~~ substantive change when it initiates its first degree program where it becomes possible for a student to complete 50% or more of an academic program via online.
 - c. An institution on sanction that initiates online courses must apply for a substantive change.
 - ~~e d.~~ An institution ~~accredited for less than ten years or an institution~~ on sanction that proposes to offer degree programs beyond the first degree where 50% or more of the program is available online must apply for a ~~major~~ substantive change.
 - ~~d e.~~ An institution ~~accredited for less than ten years or an institution on sanction~~ that proposes to ~~substantially decrease or~~ discontinue its online offerings must ~~apply for a major substantive change~~ notify the Commission on Accreditation.

Visits will be held at the discretion of ABHE.

1. Each distance education offering must feature adequate safeguards to protect the integrity of the offering, including ensuring that the person taking the class is the person registered for the class and appropriate proctoring of major examinations. To accomplish this purpose, institutions will utilize the Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Correspondence and Distance Education.
2. Institutions will utilize the Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs developed by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET).
3. Institutions utilizing distance education courses through consortial agreements with other institutions or agencies will utilize the Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses.
4. When an institution offering distance education experiences headcount enrollment growth of 50% or more in a single year, the Commission staff will inform the U.S. Department of Education of the institution's rapid growth within 30 days of acquiring such data.

F. Special Policies for Correspondence Study

1. The establishment of correspondence studies by the institution will require compliance with the Policy on Substantive Change.
 - a. Institutions must ~~apply for a major substantive change~~ notify the Commission on Accreditation to initiate correspondence instruction.
 - b. An institution having approval to use the correspondence instructional modality must apply for a ~~major~~ substantive change when it initiates its first degree program where it becomes possible for a student to complete 50% or more of an academic program via correspondence.
 - c. An institution on sanction that proposes to initiate the offering courses by correspondence must apply for a substantive change.
 - ~~e d.~~ An institution ~~accredited for less than ten years or an institution~~ on sanction that proposes to offer degree programs beyond the first degree where 50% or more of the program is available via correspondence must apply for a ~~major~~ substantive change.

- ~~d~~ e. An institution ~~accredited for less than ten years or an institution on sanction~~ that proposes to ~~substantially decrease or~~ discontinue its correspondence offerings must ~~apply for a major substantive change~~ notify the Commission on Accreditation.

Visits will be held at the discretion of ABHE.

2. Each correspondence offering must feature adequate safeguards to protect the integrity of the offering, including ensuring that the person taking the class is the person registered for the class and appropriate proctoring of major examinations. To accomplish this purpose, institutions will utilize the Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Correspondence and Distance Education.
3. When an institution offering correspondence studies experiences headcount enrollment growth of 50% or more in a single year, the Commission staff will inform the U.S. Department of Education of the institution's rapid growth within 30 days of acquiring such data.

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