Call for Comments – April 2020

PROPOSED CHANGES

Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns

Key to Changes: Delete, Add

The Commission on Accreditation (COA) recognizes various forms of learning in which education is offered apart from the main campus or through non-classroom learning.

1. Branch campus – geographically separate unit, independent of the main campus, with its own core facilities, curricula, faculty, administrative or supervisory personnel, and instructional resources, an additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution and (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

2. Additional location – off-campus site where students and faculty regularly meet in classes and where students may complete 50% or more of course work toward requirements for one or more of the institution’s educational programs via face-to-face or hybrid courses a facility that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution and at which the institution offers at least 50% of a program. An additional location may qualify as a branch campus and be subject to requirements pertaining to branch campuses.

3. Extension site/classes – off-campus site where students and faculty regularly meet in classes and where students may not complete 50% or more of course work toward requirements for one or more of the institution’s educational programs via face-to-face or hybrid courses.

4. Distance education – courses offered via online or other technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor, but where regular and substantive interaction occurs between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.

5. Correspondence education – courses in which the institution provides instructional materials by mail or electronic transmission to students who are separated from the instructor, and interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
6. Competency-based education – an outcomes-based system of instruction in which the student’s demonstrated proficiency in specified knowledge or skills is the basis for measuring satisfaction of course, program, or degree requirements, regardless of time spent in class.

Institutions with adequate resources may extend their influence through 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. All alternative academic patterns for credit or leading to a credential (degree, certificate) must be under the direct control of the institution’s administration.

Requirements for All Alternative Academic Patterns

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 COA. 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.

2. Alternative academic patterns must be offered in conformity with applicable state or provincial law.

3. 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.

4. Alternative academic patterns must contribute to the parent institution’s quality and integrity. For-credit courses 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.

5. 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.
6. 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.

7. Adequate instructional and technical support, facilities, supplies, library, and other resources that support the classes taken must be provided in alternative academic patterns.

8. The qualifications of alternative academic pattern faculty must be commensurate with those of on-campus faculty.

9. Faculty involved in the development and implementation of offerings using alternative academic patterns must be provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness.

10. 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.

11. Personnel providing services to students employing alternative academic patterns are provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness in meeting student needs.

12. Admissions standards must be appropriate for all students whether they study on campus or in an alternative academic pattern.

13. Steps are taken to establish long-term relationships with the students in alternative academic patterns so that they become members of the institution’s learning community.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. Credentials should be awarded only to alternative academic pattern students who complete a planned program consistent with institutional mission and program objectives.

17. The curricula, instruction, awarding of credit, and conferral of degrees or diplomas must remain under the control of the institution’s faculty and administration.

18. When a degree or diploma is offered through alternative academic patterns, the institution must ensure that the students fulfill ministry formation requirements.

19. 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.

Definitions of Modalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Proportion of Instruction Delivered in a Face-to-Face Setting</th>
<th>Description*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>67-100%</td>
<td>Course content is delivered in a mandatory face-to-face setting. May use some technologically-mediated educational engagement strategies to enhance the course and/or to replace some face-to-face meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>1-66%</td>
<td>Some technologically-mediated educational strategies are used to replace at least 33% of face-to-face class meetings, but not all required face-to-face meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>All course activity is done via technologically-mediated educational strategies; there are no required face-to-face sessions within the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Modality</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Instructional materials are delivered via mail or electronic means; there are no required face-to-face sessions within the course and no requirements for on-campus activity; faculty-student interaction is limited, not regular or substantive; typically courses are self-paced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Modality</td>
<td>Student Choice</td>
<td>Students are able to choose between two or more modalities for each class session and/or learning activity depending on the student’s schedule and learning preference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-Based Education</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Academic credit by fulfillment of defined competencies regardless of time spent in class, study, or research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These descriptions were informed by the working definitions from the Online Learning Consortium.

**Additional Requirements for Distance Education**

1. The establishment of distance education (online and hybrid courses) will require compliance with the Policy on Substantive Change.

2. 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.

3. Institutions will utilize the Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs developed by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET).

4. Institutions utilizing distance education courses through consortial agreements with other institutions or agencies will utilize the Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses.
5. Distance education may use internet, one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, satellite, audio/video conferencing, streaming, or wireless communications. Video cassettes, CDs/DVDs, and download files may also be used in a course in conjunction with other technologies that provide interaction between students and the instructor(s).

6. When an institution offering distance education experiences headcount enrollment growth of 50% or more in a single year, the COA staff will inform the U.S. Department of Education of the institution’s rapid growth within 30 days of acquiring such data.

7. An institution approved for both face-to-face instruction at a given location and distance education is approved for hybrid/blended courses at the same level (i.e., less than 50% of a program or 50% or more of a program) at that location.

Both distance education and correspondence education may use 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.

Additional Requirements for Correspondence Study

1. The establishment of correspondence studies will require compliance with the Policy on Substantive Change.

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. Correspondence education may include technologies such as internet, broadcast, closed circuit, satellite, audio/video conferencing, streaming, or wireless communications. It may also include video cassettes, CDs/DVDs, and other one-way communications. Correspondence education is often self-paced. What distinguishes correspondence education from distance education is the absence of regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor(s).
4. When an institution offering correspondence studies experiences headcount enrollment growth of 50% or more in a single year, the COA staff will inform the U.S. Department of Education of the institution's rapid growth within 30 days of acquiring such data.

5. Correspondence education is not distance education, and correspondence courses are not eligible for Title IV financial aid. Correspondence education is not within ABHE’s scope of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

Additional Requirements for Branch Campuses, Additional Locations, and Extension Sites

Initiation and modification of branch campuses, additional locations, and extension sites must be conducted in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change and the Policy and Procedures for Branch Campuses and Additional Locations.

Additional Requirements for Competency-Based Education

Initiation and modification of competency-based education must be conducted in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change and the Policy on Competency-Based Education.