Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

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Commission Definitions for Distance-Delivered Courses and Programs

The Higher Learning Commission uses the following definitions for the purpose of applying its policy on distance delivery to its accredited and candidate institutions:

- Distance-delivered **courses** are those in which all or the vast majority (typically 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.

- Distance-delivered **programs** are those certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered **courses.**

Federal Definitions of Correspondence Education and Distance Education

The following are the Federal definitions (2009) of distance and correspondence education:

Correspondence education 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.

Distance Education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) 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:
(1) The internet;
(2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
(3) Audio conferencing; or
(4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).