



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, the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement and 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. UW System Administration has approval and reporting requirements for distance-education programs (refer to SYS102). 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 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. The definitions align our practices with federal definitions:

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 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 and is not approved to deliver correspondence education by the Higher Learning Commission. 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, 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 (SIS 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 (SIS 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 (SIS code: WO; CDR code: T)

For questions about the course proposal process, contact Academic Planning and Institutional Research (courseproposal@provost.wisc.edu) or see the course approval guidelines (<https://apir.wisc.edu/course-planning/>).

For information about how to use the “instructional mode”, contact Curricular Services, Office of the Registrar (<https://registrar.wisc.edu/classroom-scheduling/>).

Currently (Spring 2018), 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 academic programs require institutional and UW-System approval. A formal record of these programs is required for reporting to UW System Administration, reporting to 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 (<https://apir.wisc.edu/academic-planning/>).

Degree/Majors

New Degrees and Majors

If a new degree/major program is to be delivered through distance-education, 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. This is required for any program that will be delivered more than 50% as a distance program. The percentage of the program that is distance delivered should be indicated on the named option proposal. 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 <https://apir.wisc.edu/academic-planning/>.

100% Distance-delivered Named Options

Degree/major programs adding named options that can be completed 100% via distance education require additional information for UW System Administration approval. Attach the following information to the named option proposal (limit 2 pages):

- Brief description of the existing program that will be offered via 100% distance delivery;
- Whether the program will continue to be offered via face-to-face delivery, and the percentage that will be offered via face-to-face delivery;
- A brief rationale for the change, including opportunities that will be made available to students;
- The potential impact on students, including an assessment of any changes in costs;
- The potential impact on faculty and staff;
- Information on how any lab courses required for the degree will be handled;
- Confirmation of the approval of the appropriate institutional governance body or bodies; and
- The desired effective date.

APIR/Office of the Provost will circulate the proposal addendum to all UW System provosts a notice for comment. The other UW provosts have 10 working days to respond in writing with any concerns. If no concerns are raised, UW System Administration will issue an approval memo within 15 working days after the end of the Provosts' review. If there are institutional or system-wide concerns, UW System Administration will determine the appropriate manner in which to proceed and will issue an approval or denial memo in an expeditious manner.

50% or More, But Less Than 100% Distance-delivered degree/majors

Degree/major programs adding named options that can be completed more than 50%, but less than 100% via distance education require additional information for UW System Administration approval. APIR/Office of the Provost provides the following information to UW System Administration:

- A brief description of action(s) to be taken;
- The percentage of the program that will be offered via distance delivery and the percentage of the program that will continue to be offered via face-to-face delivery;
- Confirmation of the approval of the appropriate institutional governance body or bodies; and
- The desired effective date.

UW System Administration will issue the notification memo of approval within 15 working days after receipt of the information.

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 institutional approval process. UW System Administration approval is not required. 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 <https://apir.wisc.edu/academic-planning/certificates/>.

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 assessment and program review. Programs that are over-due for review will be required to complete a review before conversion is approved.

Questions

Contact Jocelyn Milner, Director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research
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