

CAAHEP Distance Education Task Force White Paper

Upon request of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) Board of Directors, the Distance Education Task Force (DETF) submits the following recommendations and considerations for your review.

Methodology

The Distance Education Task Force (DETF) consisted of five individuals representative of the CAAHEP Board, Committees on Accreditation (CoAs), National Organizations, and working professionals. Our work began in July 2020 with an introductory meeting and a delineation of roles and responsibilities. All DETF meetings were held virtually, and minutes of each meeting were recorded and shared with all members.

Charge

The CAAHEP Distance Education Task Force is charged with exploring, reviewing, and developing best practice recommendations on distance education related to professional accreditation. These recommendations should be focused on professional accreditation policies, practices, and standards related to resources and outcomes (including assessment). (Mayhew, G. 2020]. Distance Education Task Force. *CAAHEP*).

CAAHEP Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are the values or beliefs that an organization uses to define what is important to it and how its leaders will navigate through growth and change. The DETF recommends applying the CAAHEP *guiding principles* when making decisions involving distance education.

CAAHEP Vision Statement: *CAAHEP is the innovative leader for health sciences education accreditation.*

Guiding Principles:

- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Accountability
- Consensus

Distance Education and Intersecting Definitions

Definitions provide us with the ability to explain the meaning of a term or establish a common understanding of the purpose of a word or subject for which it represents. A lack of a shared understanding of a term can lead to misinterpretation or a lack of clarity regarding the expectations of a program. It was the goal of the DETF to establish a solid set of commonly used terms with subsequent definitions of those terms as a way of providing a common understanding among stakeholders. The DETF did not put forth a definition for ‘distance education program’ as members concurred that distance education is a ‘method of delivery’ for a program’s curriculum and, as such, can be utilized in varying percentages and delivery models.

Alternate Location

Approved physical classroom or learning center, separated from the institution’s campus(es), in which faculty provide onsite (in-person), synchronous instruction to students. May be used to teach hands-on skills to students who are enrolled in programs primarily offered via distance education. This is specific to courses and not entire programs.

Asynchronous Instruction

Faculty instruction, student interactions, and learning activities that do not occur at the same time.

Blended (or Hybrid) Distance Education Delivery

Instruction within a program or course is provided using a combination of onsite (in-person) and distance education instruction, which may be synchronous or asynchronous. Clinical experiences and activities may be remote, virtual or located at affiliated sites, as approved for the given curriculum.

Correspondence Course

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), (1) A course provided 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. Interaction between the instructors and the students in the correspondence course is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (2) If a course is part of correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course to be a correspondence course. (3) A correspondence course is not distance education (85, N. 171, p.68).

Distance Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), (1) Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iv) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

(2) The technologies that may be used to offer distance education 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) Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iii) of this definition.

(3) For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by the institution's accrediting agency.

(4) For purposes of this definition, substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and timely assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following—

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or,
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(5) An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency—

- (i) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
- (ii) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed, on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student (85, N. 171, p.68).

Flipped Classroom

Teaching strategy in which the faculty member provides traditional lecture materials for students to review in advance, typically in video- or audio-recorded presentations, then scheduled class time is used for students to discuss the materials, practice applying key concepts, ask for additional clarification, and/or engage in group activities.

Full Distance Education Delivery

Method of delivery in which all instruction within a program is provided through distance education, meaning that the instructor and student are physically separated and using technology to interact (see Distance Education definition). Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Clinical experiences and activities may be remote, virtual or located at affiliated sites, as approved for the given curriculum.

Full Onsite (In-Person) Delivery

Method of delivery in which all instruction within a program is provided at an approved onsite location (on or off campus), where instructors and students are interacting simultaneously in the same physical location. Clinical experiences and activities may be remote, virtual or located at affiliated sites, as approved for the given curriculum.

Hyflex

Educational model in which students have the option to attend a course onsite (in person), through distance education, or alternate between the methods, based upon individual student preference or need. For programs or courses set up on a Hyflex delivery, offering predictable regularly scheduled synchronous activity with qualified faculty helps to ensure consistency and quality in education. Clinical experiences and activities may be remote, virtual or located at affiliated sites, as approved for the given curriculum.

Independent Study

Course in which a student pursues an area of research or study independently, with minimal to no instruction, guidance, or supervision from faculty. Typically, a faculty member will approve the student's topic and deadlines, and assign a specific number of academic credits based upon the given educational activity in advance. This delivery method may not meet the distance education definition for regular and substantive interactions. Also referred to as Directed Study.

Learning Management System (LMS)

Platform or software application for the administration, management, and delivery of distance education courses, or the administration and management of onsite (in-person) courses. Can serve as a repository for resources, activities, assessments, and communication for onsite (in-person) and/or distance education courses.

Learning Management System (LMS) Enhanced Course

A course which uses a LMS to supplement or augment instruction by serving as a repository for posted announcements, readings, assignments, assessments, and/or grading.

State Reciprocity Agreements and Approvals

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), in collaboration with the four regional higher education compacts, has developed and implemented a reciprocal state-level authorization process for postsecondary distance education.

SARA is an agreement among member states, districts, and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education (nc-sara.org, 2020).

Synchronous Instruction

Faculty instruction or student interaction that takes place simultaneously in real-time. Questions, responses, and feedback can be provided immediately.

Recommendations for Best Practices in Distance Education

According to Rouse (2020), a best practice is: “a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result” (para 1). Further, a best practice is one that has been shown to outperform other approaches and continues to progress through incremental stages (Rouse, 2020). After careful review of the literature, discussions with peers, and experience of the members of this task force; the DETF recognizes and recommends the adoption of the following *best practices* as related to professional accreditation policies, practices, and standards in relation to resources and outcomes.

Best Practice Recommendations	CAAHEP Standard	Evidence	Possible Alterations to Standard Language?
The program sponsor will have appropriate approval(s) to offer distance education - institutional accreditor and state, as applicable	I.A. Sponsorship	<p>The program provides evidence of state approval or reciprocity in all states where students are located or participating in program activities (e.g., clinical rotations). Or documentation noting that approval is not required in a given state in which a student is located/participating in program activities (state website, email, letter).</p> <p>The program provides evidence of approval from institutional accreditor to offer distance education.</p>	<p>Is this covered under the language “authorized under applicable law or other acceptable authority to provide a post-secondary program”? If yes, no change needed. If no, add new language.</p> <p>No change needed.</p>
The program implements a process to Authenticate Student Identity that is consistent with institutional policies for academic integrity and honesty.	III.A. Resources-Type and Amount	The program clearly identifies how student identities are authenticated in distance education delivery and demonstrates how academic integrity and honesty are assured.	Consider adding as sub-item under III.A.12. Information Technology.
The program has adequate information technology resources (software/hardware/internet access) for students and faculty.	III.A. Resources-Type and Amount	The program clearly identifies information technology resources for teaching and learning.	Considering defining III.A.12. Information Technology as it pertains to distance delivery.
The program has technical support (i.e. Help Desk) for students and faculty.	III.A. Resources-Type and Amount	The program demonstrates that technical support is made available to stakeholders, including a published schedule when technical support is made available.	Consider adding as sub-item under III.A.12. Information Technology.

<p>The program has a delivery system/LMS – infrastructure/data loss protection, scalability, resources (bandwidth) to deliver without interruption and support enrollment.</p>	<p>III.A. Resources -Type and Amount</p>	<p>The program maintains a technology plan that allocates resources for the assessment of program effectiveness and technology requirements for maintaining a secure and reliable infrastructure for distance education.</p>	<p>Consider incorporating into Standard I.B.3. that requires a preparedness plan, or as a sub-item or guideline under III.A.12. Information Technology.</p>
<p>Students have access to resources including educational, administrative, and student services.</p>	<p>III.A. Resources-Type and Amount (Ancillary student facilities)</p>	<p>The program verifies that students enrolled in distance education have access to all student services, information resources, technology requirements, etc., that are necessary for student achievement of program outcomes.</p>	<p>No change needed.</p>
<p>The program has access to instructional design support and/or an experienced individual to develop or assist faculty in development of DE courses.</p>	<p>III.A. Resources-Type and Amount</p>	<p>The program demonstrates that an individual(s) with experience and competency in distance education instructional design contributes to the curriculum development.</p>	<p>Consider adding sub-item or guideline to Curriculum resource.</p>
<p>There is institutional oversight of the distance education delivery system.</p>	<p>III.A. Resources-Type and Amount</p>	<p>The program demonstrates an institutional commitment to the administrative oversight of the delivery system (LMS).</p>	<p>Consider adding as sub-item or guideline under III.A.12. Information Technology.</p>
<p>Faculty development and training on distance education delivery.</p>	<p>III.A. Resources-Type and Amount</p>	<p>The program demonstrates that faculty receive distance education orientation and training on instructional methods and delivery platform.</p>	<p>Consider adding to III.A.14. Support for Faculty Professional Development.</p>

Students are provided orientation to distance education delivery system(s).	III.A. Resources-Type and Amount	The program demonstrates support for students on distance education learning and delivery platform (i.e., LMS).	Consider adding as sub-item or guideline under III.A.12. Information Technology.
The curriculum includes regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students, and among students (see new USDE definition – effective June 2021).	III.C. Curriculum	The program provides evidence that distance education delivery supports regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty.	Due to the focus on substantive interaction & it's intersection with distance education, consider adding new language to Standards.
Faculty are evaluated on their knowledge and effectiveness in delivery of distance education.	III.D. Resource Assessment (Faculty)	The program provides evidence of regular assessment of the faculty member's knowledge and effectiveness in delivery of distance education. (i.e., annual performance review, peer review, distance education classroom evaluations).	No change needed.
The program assesses effectiveness of the delivery method (i.e. Program Effectiveness Plan) and assures a level of academic rigor, objectives, and competencies to meet outcomes thresholds.	III.D. Resource Assessment (Curriculum)	The program provides evidence that it regularly assesses the effectiveness of distance education delivery by gathering and analyzing data.	No change needed.
There are clear disclosures regarding program delivery, expectations, and student support resources needed to complete the program.	V.A.2. Publications and Disclosure (to applicants and students)	The program clearly discloses program delivery, expectations, and student support resources (provided by the program vs. required of the student) needed to meet the program delivery method and distance education program outcomes (i.e., fees, information technology for hardware & software, program provided student support resources, etc.).	Add new item under V.A.2.

The program assures and preserves academic integrity/honesty.	V.A.3 Publications and Disclosure (to students)	Programs provide their policy on Academic Integrity/Honesty and how it is disclosed to all students.	Add an additional sub-item under V.A.3. to require the program's policy on academic integrity/honesty.
The program protects student privacy.	V.C. Safeguards	The Program has written procedures for protecting student privacy that are consistently applied for all students regardless of distance education modalities.	Add language to Standard V.C. that includes privacy must be safeguarded in addition to health and safety that is currently stated in the Standard.

Conclusion and Considerations:

The CAAHEP DETF submits that through our research and subsequent work, we strongly recommend that CAAHEP develop the following:

- Consider adding Appendix C to the *CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines* to delineate any requirements specific to distance education delivery.
- Programs must meet the *CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines* regardless of delivery method.
- *For institutions offering multiple program delivery methods:* Institutions have the autonomy to determine if each delivery method is put forth as an individual program for CAAHEP accreditation *under the guidance of their respective CoA*. An Annual Report must be submitted for EACH program receiving CAAHEP accreditation. If using one Annual Report to demonstrate program outcomes, programs must be able to analyze and separate the cause of the outcomes issue(s) and to which delivery method they are attributed.
- In the instance of varying accreditation requirements (institutional vs programmatic vs State), programs should default to the most stringent accreditation standards.
- Move towards a listing of the delivery method in the online CAAHEP Directory. Verify that programs currently listed as Online/Distance Education follow the criteria for this designation of delivery. Language that CAAHEP adopts regarding distance education definitions should be consistent across all communications.
- Design a webinar to inform program directors, administrators, and CoAs of the adoption of these findings.
- Provide training to evaluators and site visitors to support their knowledge of distance education requirements implemented in the Standards, and how to appropriately review them.

References

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