



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Guidelines for Preparing Reports on the Establishment
of
Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education**

These guidelines are provided to assist institutions preparing reports regarding their distance education activities for consideration by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education as required by its policy on the “Review of Electronically Offered Degree Programs.”*

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Commission sufficient information to perform a paper review of a member institution’s plans to undertake distance education activities. Such reviews must occur before the new activities can be encompassed within the institution’s accreditation. In keeping with the policy statement mentioned above, the report is required of affiliated institutions which offer, or plan to offer, 50% or more of a degree program through technologically mediated instruction to students at a distance and degree completion programs offered on-line. It is not meant to encompass on-line courses offered outside the context of a predominantly on-line degree or certificate program, nor technologically mediated instruction provided to campus-based students.

Content

The report should present ample evidence that the institution’s plans to undertake distance education activities fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*. To this end, it should demonstrate that the proposed activities are compatible with the institution’s mission; that appropriate planning has occurred; that sufficient resources, technological, human and otherwise, will be brought to bear to assure quality programming; that the institution has designed appropriate mechanisms to assess and improve the quality of its distance education programming and to plan for its future development. Emphasis throughout the report should be on the distinctive characteristics of the electronic delivery system and support utilized to assure its educational effectiveness other than institutional elements integral to any academic programming. Individuals preparing the report should assume

* This policy statement, the *Standards for Accreditation* as well as other materials cited, are available on the Commission’s web site: <http://www.neasc.org/cihe/cihe.htm>

that it will be reviewed by someone knowledgeable about distance education offered electronically.

Reports should not exceed 20 pages single spaced, or 40 pages double-spaced, excluding the data sheets. The following items should be included:

1. Cover Page. Include the title *Report on the Establishment of Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education*, institution's name, and submission date.
2. Descriptive Information. This initial section of the report should include the following information:
 - a. Name, title, e-mail address, of the following individuals:
 - Person with institutional responsibility for the academic quality of distance education programming (name and title);
 - Person to be contacted with questions (if any) about the content of the report (name, title and contact information);
 - b. The URL(s), including passwords where necessary, where information about the institution's distance activities is available and where on-line services can be accessed by both students (prospective and current) and faculty; include brief descriptors of each as appropriate.;
 - c. A description of the technical infrastructure designed to support the institution's distance education activities (include bandwidth, details of connectivity, network maintenance and support, course management software including the version of the software, help desk services, and staffing, security, backups, etc.);
 - d. A list of any consortial partners or contractual relationships that support the institution's distance education activities with a brief explanation of each relationship.
3. Narrative. This section of the report should provide a description and self-evaluation of the institution's planned distance education activity together with a discussion of any longer-term plans regarding its further development including its improvement. Emphasis should be placed on the distinctive characteristics of on-line instruction and the various resources devoted to its support within the larger institutional context. The narrative should both demonstrate that these activities fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation* and provide evidence that the institution is actively and systematically engaged in appraising the educational effectiveness, particularly as measured by student learning, of its on-line programming and using the results for improvement. The narrative should give particular emphasis to:
 - a. Institutional mission (especially *Standards for Accreditation, Mission and Purposes*, 1.1-1.3);
 - b. Planning and evaluation (especially *Planning and Evaluation*, 2.1-2.2, and 2.4-2.6);

- c. Organization, including a description of where responsibility for distance education falls within the institutional structure (especially *Organization and Governance*, 3.1, 3.7, 3.8);
- d. Educational programming (especially *The Academic Program*, 4.2-4.10, 4.12, 4.29-4.43, and 4.44-4.46);
- e. Faculty (especially *Faculty*, 5.1-5.4, 5.7-5.8, 5.10-5.12);
- f. Services, (especially *Students*, 6.1-6.3, 6.4-6.8, 6.10-6.11, 6.17);
- g. Library and technological support (especially *Library and Other Information Resources*, 7.3, 7.5-7.11 and *Physical and Technological Resources*, 8.1-8.2, 8.4-8.5);
- h. *Financial Resources* (9.8-9.9);
- i. Dealing with students, prospective students, and the public (especially *Public Disclosure*, 10.1-10.11, 10.13 and *Integrity*, especially 11.2-11.8);
- j. Contractual relationships (see the Commission Policy on Good Practices in Contractual Relationships).

Individuals preparing this section of the report are encouraged to consult the document “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs.” Prepared jointly by the eight regional commissions, it provides an explication of how the well-established essentials of institutional quality found in regional accreditation standards are applicable to distance education.

4. **Data Sheets.** Data forms 1-4 may be requested by e-mailing cihe@neasc.org. Please return the completed forms in a printed form with the report.

Submission of Report Four (4) copies of the report and the completed forms, printed on three-holed punched paper, should be submitted to the office of the Commission:

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
 New England Association of Schools and Colleges
 209 Burlington Road
 Bedford, MA 01730-1433

An electronic copy, including the data forms, should be forwarded also to cihe@neasc.org.

Review Processes The institutional report will be reviewed by the Commission at one of its regularly scheduled meetings.

Staff Assistance The Commission’s staff will be pleased to answer questions about the nature and content of the institutional report. Call: 781-271 0022 or e-mail: cihe@neasc.org.