Definition of An Online Program

Questions:

2015

Does your institution have a definition of an online program? Does the state agency/entity that approves your academic programs have a definition of an online program? Would you mind sharing that definition and/or the policy that references the definition of an online program?

Here are two examples:

Ohio Board of Regents Guidelines and Procedures for Academic Program Review: https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/Academic-Program-Review-Guidelines_FINAL_042915.pdf

> *page 54 Appendix A: Definitions*
> Online Degree: A degree in where most (>80%) of the degree can be completed online.
> Blended/Hybrid Degrees: A degree that blends online and on-ground delivery; a substantial portion of the degree requirements are available online and there are a reduced number of face-to face meetings.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: http://www.thecb.state.tx.us

> Distance Education Policies, Procedures, and Forms
> Coordinating Board rules define distance education as "The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction." Distance education can include courses and programs offered online, off-campus face-to-face, and electronic-to-groups.

– Kelley Brandt, Boise State University, Associate Director, eCampus Center

2014

How do states, systems and institutions define various distance ed activities, such as all online, blended, in person IVN, classes at a branch location, classes with some f2f & online, all of the above.

–   Tanya Spilovoy

Answers:

We don't have a definition for a program but we do have definitions for online courses. You will find the definitions at http://online.ucf.edu/about/mission/ucf-distributed-learning-guidelines/

Scroll down to item 5 on the page. Also, the end of the same item covers a state law that defines a fully online course.

Please note that we use Mix Mode/Reduced Seat Time as our term for blended or hybrid courses.

If you have further questions, please let me know.

–   Linda S. Futch, Ed.D., Department Head, University of Central Florida

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The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) defines distance delivered programs as those in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance delivered courses (75% + of instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other). MU expands the HLC definition to include programs delivered in nontraditional or atypical formats to reach working professionals.

–   Kim L. Siegenthaler, Ph.D., Director, Mizzou Online, University of Missouri

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From Maryland's Code of Regulations 13B.02.03 Academic Programs - Degree Granting Institutions

(7) "Distance education program" means:
(a) For an institution of higher education other than a community college, a program in which more than 50 percent of the program is offered through electronic distribution of instruction to one or more sites other than the principal location of an institution; or
(b) For a community college, a program in which more than 50 percent of the program is offered through electronic distribution of instruction outside the community college service area.

–   Dr. Barbara G. Zirkin, Associate Dean, Distance Learning, Stevenson University

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New York/NYSED's definition: Colleges and universities located in or operating in New York State that offer degree or certificate programs in which a major portion (i.e., 50% or more) of the requirements can be completed through study delivered by distance education must have those programs registered in the distance education format.

Source link: http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/ded/reviewoptions.html

> – Meghan Hefferan, The New School, Administrative Coordinator, Provost's Office

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Great question, Kelly. We recently had this conversation in our institution. We decided to follow our accreditor's definition (HLC) to the extent possible. We arrived at the following.

Online Course >= 75% of the course is offered online F2F Course <= 25% online Hybrid Course is between 26% and 74% online

Online Program >= 50% online (HLC Definition) F2F Program <= 25% online Hybrid is between 26% and 49% online

> – Chad A. Maxson, Associate Dean of Online Strategy Olivet Nazarene University

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The Texas Coordinating Board (THECB) definitions: "The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction." Distance education can include courses and programs offered online, off-campus face-to-face, and electronic-to-groups. Coordinating Board rules recognize two categories of distance education courses: fully distance education courses and hybrid/blended courses. A fully distance education course is defined as "A course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time. Examples of face-to-face sessions include orientation, laboratory, exam review, or an in-person test." A hybrid/blended course is defined as "A course in which a majority (more than 50 percent but less than 85 percent), of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place."

> – Julie McElhany, Director, Center for Faculty Excellence & Innovation, Texas A&M University – Commerce

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I am very interested in this issue about the definition of "distance ed", "distance ed course", and "distance ed program". It is a bit disheartening to see that the Department of Education, accrediting agencies, states, QM, and OCL are all over the map in the definitions that they use. How do we know who is talking about what? In our work on IPEDS distance ed enrollments, it was clear that institutions were often just ignoring the IPEDS definition and using whatever they used locally. Others were taking great pains to

follow the IPEDS directions. From the IPEDS glossary: http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/?charindex=D here is what they say:

Distance Education	Education that uses one or more 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. Technologies used for instruction may include the following: Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; and video cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.
Distance Education Course	A course in which the instructional content is delivered exclusively via distance education (http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/index.asp?id=713) Requirements for coming to campus for orientation, testing, or academic support services do not exclude a course from being classified as distance education.
Distance Education Program	A program for which all the required coursework for program completion is able to be completed via distance education courses (http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/index.asp?id=976).

I know that OLC tried to address this last year, but I found this to be too granular.

(***these definitions have been updated since this discussion: https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/updated-e-learning-definitions-2/ ***)

Ken Sauer, Indiana Commission for Higher Education, and I are working on a short paper on this issue and suggesting a call to action to remedy it.

Are we on the right track? Should we try to remedy it? Does it matter? What would you suggest?

— Russ Poulin, WCET

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Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) Definition: Distance delivery is defined as offering more than 50% of the total courses/degree programs via distance technology. Distance delivery includes all forms of Internet, electronic, digital, online, or any other technology driven delivery system.

— Beverly Wade, Institutional Compliance Analyst, Global Campus, University of Arkansas

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Quality Matters has this nice table that describes Online vs Blended/Hybrid vs Face to Face: https://www.qualitymatters.org/qm-membership/faqs/course-format-chart

– Jim Synder

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At Bucks County Community College, we consider an online program one that is 100% online – regardless of definitions found elsewhere. There are two exceptions that we make clear to students: 1) certain programs of study may require a practicum which cannot be completed online, and 2) certain courses may require proctored testing (but that does not need to be done at our institution).

If we went by the definitions cited so far on this string of emails, we could say that 66 of our degree programs are available online. Wow! Instead, we offer 16 associates and 2 certificates TOTALLY online. If we were to begin advertising those other 50 degrees that seem to meet the "definitions" given so far, it definitely wouldn't be as an Online Degree. In my mind, that's a cause for confusion.

We've been offering distance ed (now online) courses since 1994. For the first 10 years, a COURSE could have 4 on-campus meetings and still be classified as a Distance Ed (now Online) course. We had way too much pushback from students who found that very misleading. They were signing up for an online course and that's what they wanted. Everything online!! So, our online courses are 100% online (again, with the caveat that some may require proctored testing). We wouldn't approach our Online Programs any differently. We listened to our students.

– Georglyn Davidson, Director, Online Learning & User Support, Bucks County Community College

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Several years ago, while writing my dissertation this was a touchy topic to define. It is pretty straight forward though. As an example, a fully online program is distance education, a blended program where part of the course is taught remotely is distance education, teleconference courses are distance education, correspondence is distance education. Distance education is the placeholder for all courses that have all or part of the curriculum taught through some form of remote access or delivery. It's the broad holding category. It is misused at times interchangeably with sub-categories. Most often the misuse is to suggest the use of the term to describe an online course format. The lingering problem is that sometimes decision makers misuse the term, and by definition create a different definition (2-2 million) that they use internally.

– Alan Hansen, Independence University

This is the IPEDS definition: Education that uses one or more 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.

Technologies used for instruction may include the following: Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; and video cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.

– Russ Poulin, WCET

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Here's how "distance education" is defined in Texas in the Texas Administrative Code (Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter P, Section 4.257 - Source: http://txrules.elaws.us/rule/title19_chapter4_sec.4.257):

(8) Distance Education -- The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction.

(9) Distance Education Course -- A course in which a majority (more than 50 percent) of the instruction occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are not in the same place. Two categories of distance education courses are defined:

(A) Fully Distance Education Course -- A course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time. Examples of face-to-face sessions include orientation, laboratory, exam review, or an in-person test.

(B) Hybrid/Blended Course -- A course in which a majority (more than 50 percent but less than 85 percent), of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place.

10) Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program -- A program in which a student may complete a majority (more than 50 percent) of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses.

More detailed information about how public institutions in Texas are required to report can be found in the Reporting and Procedures Manual for Texas Public Universities. Of particular interest to the WCET colleague who submitted this topic would be the pages describing "location code" and "instruction mode" (see pages 4.8 and 4.13-14) which are the data fields for determining if a course is delivered via distance education.

– Patrick Pluscht, Associate Vice Provost and Director for the Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign (CLEAR), University of North Texas

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Our modes are defined by our AAUP Contract. The defined are explained in detail on p. 58 of our contract at: http://ccc-aaup.org/wp1/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FINAL_CCC-AAUP_pages.pdf.

We also provided simplified language to students on each modality at: http://www.tri-c.edu/onlinelearning/Pages/default.aspx

– Danielle Budzick, Director, Innovative Learning Design & Quality, Cuyahoga Community College

About:

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