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## Memorandum

TO: ABHES-Accredited Institutions and Programs  
Recognized Accrediting Agencies  
State Departments of Education  
Kay Gilcher, U.S. Department of Education  
Interested Parties

FROM: Carol Money maker, Executive Director

DATE: January 31, 2012

SUBJECT: Final Revisions to *Accreditation Manual* Regarding Distance Education  
Effective February 1, 2012

The Commission considered comments received regarding its December 22, 2011, notice of proposed changes to the *Accreditation Manual*. After careful consideration of all comments received, the Commission acted to approve the changes to Chapter III.B.4.D. and Appendix G regarding distance education. User fees will be updated to include a charge of \$250 for the Application for Expansion of Distance Education described in Chapter III. B.4.D. The revisions are **effective February 1, 2012**, and are listed below in blue, with deletions struck in red and existing language in black.

### Chapter III, Section B - Institutional Changes, Subsection ~~1~~ 4. Program modifications, Discontinuations and Additions

#### D. ~~Change in Delivery~~ Addition or Expansion of Distance Education

~~Completion of the Application for Change in Method of Delivery is required for the addition of a distance education component to a currently approved program.~~ ABHES defines distance education as a formal educational process using technologies (as listed in the Glossary) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. Correspondence education, which is typically self-paced with limited interaction between the students and instructor, is not within ABHES' scope of recognition and is therefore not eligible for accreditation by ABHES.

Prior to the implementation or expansion of distance education, the following applications must be submitted and approved as indicated:

#### 1. Application for Distance Education Delivery

- a. The initial (first-time) addition of distance education to a currently accredited institution or an institution holding programmatic accreditation; and,
- b. A significant change to or departure from the format, method, or third-party curriculum provider of distance education delivery previously approved by ABHES and utilized by the institution. (Note: A change in the Learning Management System need not be reported unless the change impacts the curriculum.)

#### 2. Application for Expansion of Distance Education Delivery:

- a. Any expansion of the previously approved **type** of distance education courses offered (i.e. general education courses, electives, core courses, laboratory-based courses, remote clinical/externship, or other similar major groupings);
- b. The addition of distance education courses to a program not previously approved for distance education; and,
- c. The expansion of an approved blended program to one that is fully delivered via distance education (i.e. partially delivered via distance education to fully delivered via distance education).

For those institutions or programs applying for the first time to offer program(s) by distance education (not approved and evaluated previously by ABHES to offer programs by distance delivery), an on-site verification visit ~~is will be~~ conducted by a distance education specialist within six (6) months of approval. The verification visit is used to ensure early on that the institution has ~~in place what is necessary the~~ necessary resources in place to deliver distance education offerings effectively. ~~effectively by distance learning.~~ A significant expansion (see III.B.4.2.a.-c.) to an institution's distance education offerings may require a remote or on-ground site visit by a distance education and program specialist.

It is the responsibility of an institution to make appropriate notification of program modifications to local, state, and federal entities. If a program must be approved by a state before it can be offered, an institution or program obtains state authorization to offer the ~~degree~~ method of delivery prior to applying for Commission approval. ~~Programmatic members will provide evidence of their institutional accreditor's approval for the delivery method.~~ In cases where accrediting standards and state regulations differ, the more stringent apply. New or expanded distance education courses and programs may not be implemented or advertised until ABHES approval has been granted.

## APPENDIX ~~H-G~~ DISTANCE EDUCATION

This appendix has been developed for institutions and programs engaged in distance education delivery methods.

NOTE: Requirements identified throughout the ABHES *Accreditation Manual* apply, in their entirety, to those offering distance education courses and programs. ~~delivery methods.~~ Appendix G contains **additional** requirements that apply specifically to ~~The following is a list of additional requirements to be applied to~~ institutions and programs offering distance education. ~~delivery.~~ The institution or program shall: ~~An institution or program adheres to the following:~~

### **I. ~~Advertising and Publications~~**

1. Publishes objectives that identify or incorporate the use of distance education delivery ~~methods.~~ ~~systems (synchronous or asynchronous).~~
2. Discloses delivery methods in the catalog and other institutional publications.

3. Discloses specialized or different fees associated with distance education to prospective and current students.
4. Publishes the technology resources required for successful program or course completion.
5. Clearly outline expectations, admissions requirements or prerequisites for participating in distance education courses or programs in the catalog.

## II. Approvals & Agreements

1. Maintains documentation of ABHES approvals for distance education activities and compliance with all applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations ~~and laws~~.
2. Maintains records of third-party contractual arrangements regarding delivery of distance education.
- ~~3. Maintains sufficient externship agreements, as applicable, for all students enrolled in the program, if applicable. (Moved to the Externship section)~~

## III. Administration & Management ~~& Faculty~~

1. Ensure sufficient facilities, equipment, technology, budget, and other resources and infrastructure to support distance education offerings and their growth. Management must demonstrate that the infrastructure can support enrollment growth, which is monitored annually by ABHES.
2. ~~Retains~~ Have an individual trained and experienced in the design development and delivery of distance education who is (i) employed by either the institution or its parent corporation, and (ii) participates in the development of the instructional design of the distance delivery model being used by the institution ~~or~~ program.
3. Employs an ~~on-site~~ individual(s) responsible for administering ~~overseeing~~ the delivery of the ~~online~~ distance education course(s). ~~, including the externship component, if applicable.~~
- ~~4. Document regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students and among students in distance education courses and ensures that student faculty ratios can support such activities. (moved to the Faculty section)~~
4. Have an individual trained and experienced in the current best practices of instructor/facilitator techniques for the institution's chosen delivery method who is (i) employed by the institution or its parent company and may be on-site or remote, and (ii) participates in the evaluation (or assessment) of the effectiveness of faculty in the distance education environment.
- ~~5. Has~~ Have a minimum of one ~~representative~~ advisory board member, not affiliated with the institution specializing, who specializes in the method of distance education delivery ~~on its advisory~~ (i.e. online education, video conferencing). The specialist's role is, at a minimum, to review and comment on the method of delivery, process and infrastructure in the context of the courses or programs.

- ~~5. Documents externship activities, if applicable, regarding student placement, supervision and evaluation. This documentation minimally includes evidence that:~~
- ~~a. the student is provided assistance in seeking placement at an externship site;~~
  - ~~b. the student is effectively supervised during the externship experience by an individual with the necessary experience and education in the field;~~
  - ~~c. that the student's achievement of competencies is evaluated by the supervisor throughout the externship; and~~
  - ~~d. there is contact between the externship site supervisor and the institution throughout the experience. (Moved to Externship section)~~

#### **IV. Faculty**

1. Documents **timely**, regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students and among students in distance education courses. ~~and ensures that student-faculty ratios can support such activities.~~
2. Ensure that the faculty-to-student ratios can support such interaction. Faculty-to-student ratio is a maximum of 1:25 for distance education courses.
3. Ensure that the teaching loads are reasonable to provide time for instruction, course development, grading and administrative duties.
4. Documentation to support that faculty members participate, at least annually, in professional development or in-service specific to distance education pedagogy.
5. Establish and document a process to demonstrate that **its** distance education instructors:
  - a. have the requisite education, **qualifications** and experience as outlined in the *Accreditation Manual*;
  - b. are ~~have been~~ trained in **the** effective distance education instructional methods; ~~delivery of distance education specific to its on-line learning platform; and~~
  - c. are trained in the use of the institution's **specific to its on-line** learning management system (LMS); and ~~platform; and~~
  - ~~c. ensure externship site includes a variety of experiences relevant to the course syllabus.~~
  - d. have performance reviews to assess their effectiveness in the distance education environment.

#### **V. Admissions Requirements & Enrollment**

1. Establish admissions requirements for distance education courses or programs and assess whether students have the skills and competencies to succeed in distance education.

#### **VI. Curricula & Programs**

1. Offer education or training of sufficient quality to achieve its stated objectives.
2. Maintain documentation to justify and validate the clock or credit hours awarded.
3. Incorporate distance education methods, expectations and requirements in the syllabi containing requisite components as detailed in Appendix G.
4. Provide in the coursework for timely, regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students and among students.

## VII. Student Support Services

1. Provide orientation ~~specific to distance learning~~ to students prior to the first day of class to acclimate them to the ~~specific~~ distance education learning methodology and ~~technology~~ (i.e. navigating the online classroom).
2. Provide technical support specific to distance education activities to assist students in completing the ~~program requirements of the program~~.
3. Provide documentation to evidence that the institution provides the student services, such as counseling, academic advising, guidance, employment assistance and financial aid, as applicable, for students enrolled in distance education courses and programs. ~~as is required in Chapter V, Section G of the Accreditation Manual to students enrolled in distance education.~~ (ABHES requires the same *caliber* of student services to be provided to all students without regard to the method of instructional delivery.)

## VIII. Technology & Learning Resources

1. Provides a means to verify the hardware and software capability of the ~~student's~~ computer used to meet the technical requirements of the program or course.
2. ~~Verifies~~ Use an authentication process to verify that the identity of ~~a~~ the student who registers in ~~participates in~~ distance education coursework ~~methods~~ is the same student who ~~participates in, completes and receives credit for the coursework~~ through use of a secure login and pass code, ~~or~~ proctored examinations, ~~and new~~ or other methods or technologies that ~~are~~ effectively ~~in~~ verify ~~ing~~ student identity.
3. Notify students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity.
43. Use processes that protect student privacy. ~~and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity.~~
54. Demonstrate that the selected ~~on-line~~ learning management ~~platform~~ system (LMS) has the following, as applicable:
  - a. infrastructure that ensures against short- and long-term data loss, ~~and~~ ;

b. ability to accommodate current enrollment and expected near-term growth in enrollment; and,

~~b~~c. sufficient bandwidth to deliver learning materials without noticeable slowdowns in ~~i~~ Internet connectivity.

6. Provide instructional and library resources that are readily available and accessible to distance education students.

#### **IX. Externship, if applicable**

(Externship section is new, but language was combined from other sections)

1. Employ an ~~on-site~~ individual(s) responsible for ~~overseeing~~ administering the externship component.

2. Ensure externship sites include a variety of experiences relevant to the course syllabus.

3. Maintain sufficient externship agreements, as applicable, for all students enrolled in the program.

4. Document externship activities, if applicable, regarding student placement, supervision and . This documentation minimally includes evidence that:

a. the student is provided assistance in seeking placement at an externship site;

b. the student is effectively supervised during the externship experience by an individual with the necessary experience and education in the field;

c. that the student's achievement of competencies is evaluated by the supervisor throughout the externship; and

d. there is contact between the externship site supervisor and the institution throughout the experience.

#### **X. Objectives & Outcomes**

1. Ensure the objectives of distance education programs are consistent with the mission of the school and are published in the catalog.

2. Monitor academic progress to ensure that distance education students are advised of their progress in a timely manner and that assistance is offered, if needed.

~~1~~3. Assess the educational effectiveness of its distance education delivery systems through the use of its Program Effectiveness Plan. This assessment includes retention, placement and credentialing data, and a comparison between the ~~on-line~~ distance education ~~delivery~~ and on-campus delivery outcomes, if applicable.