



# ABHES BULLETIN

To: ABHES-Accredited Institutions and Programs  
From: India Y. Tips, Executive Director  
Date: May 22, 2020  
Subject: COVID-19 - Extended Flexibilities

ABHES continues to monitor and assess the circumstances and impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) on our institutions and accreditation operations. Institutions should continue executing their emergency preparedness protocols and continuity education/operation plans and its efforts to ensure students meet required professional program competencies in compliance with applicable federal, state and credentialing requirements for entry level employment.

This guidance provides updated information that expands upon previous Bulletins. **The U.S. Department of Education released updated guidance on May 15, 2020, available for [DOWNLOAD](#), concerning interruptions of study related to COVID-19.**

ABHES continues to require that institutions maintain documentation of any temporary waivers of regulations received from federal, state or other regulatory bodies governing the operation of the institution and/or program(s). The Commission recognizes the challenges facing allied health institutions and will take those challenges into consideration when assessing compliance with accreditation standards provided documentation is maintained to demonstrate the institution's efforts to safeguard students and maintain the integrity of the educational process.

## **Distance Education**

In the ABHES Bulletin, dated April 6, 2020 ([https://www.abhes.org/news\\_item/coronavirus-update/](https://www.abhes.org/news_item/coronavirus-update/)), institutions and programs that intended to offer new or expanded distance education methods beyond June 1, 2020, were directed to submit the appropriate distance education application by May 1, 2020.

For those applications received to date, ABHES continues to follow its normal review procedures. Approval of these applications provides for formal ABHES approval of the distance education delivery modalities to be included within the current grant of accreditation. Such approval also provides for the flexibility to continue offering the distance education modalities as needed and does not preclude an institution from returning to its residential-only (on-ground) delivery method per Chapter III.4.C.(c) at any point in the future.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Notification to ABHES is required for the discontinuation of a previously approved delivery method, i.e. residential, blended or full distance education (defined as any delivery method that has not been in operation for a continuous 12-month period). Notification must be submitted on the [Notice of Discontinuation of Program and/or Delivery Method Form](#).*"

The Department's May 15, 2020, guidance provides ABHES more time to process the distance education applications; thus, institutions or programs that wish to seek formal approval of its new or expanded distance education methods, who have not submitted an application, may do so now. Temporary approval of the new or expanded distance education modalities will be extended beyond June 1, 2020, for those institutions that submit a distance education application to allow for proper and adequate processing and review time. The **most current** version of the distance education applications are available for download at <https://www.abhes.org/resources/#Applications>.

An institution or program that does not wish to seek formal approval of its new or expanded distance education methods initiated as a result of COVID-19 beyond June 1, 2020, may seek extended temporary approval by submitting the following on or before **June 1, 2020**:

1. A written request to the Commission to extend temporary distance education approval for current and new students who have started or will start on or before **June 1, 2020**.
2. A list of current students in each applicable program and the date when each student is anticipated to either complete the current term or payment period.

**Note: The institution's extended temporary approval for utilizing new or expanded distance education delivery methods will expire on the latest date on the school's list indicating a student is anticipated to complete either the current term or payment period.**

3. A signed agreement that the institution will not utilize new or expanded distance education delivery methods beyond the expiration date of the extended temporary approval unless it seeks formal ABHES approval through completion of the appropriate distance education application. The application must be submitted prior to the expiration of the extended temporary approval period.
4. A description of the temporary distance education methods currently utilized in each program, if different, relative to areas noted below.
  - Technologies used to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor.
  - Approaches used to ensure academic rigor of the program curriculum to justify the clock hours/credits awarded.
  - Methods for ensuring timely, regular, and substantive interaction between faculty and students and among students for courses offered in the distance education environment.
  - Technology requirements (hardware and software) for students participating in the distance education environment, and options presented to students that do not meet the technology requirements.
  - Policy and process followed for students who do not want to move to the distance education environment (e.g., Leave of Absence (LOA), amended withdrawal and refund policies, etc.).
  - Technical support and training for faculty.
  - Student support including technical and academic services.
  - Student to faculty ratio(s).
5. Evidence that the institution's continued offering of new or expanded distance education does not conflict with any state law or regulation. The institution must provide evidence of any applicable state approval, exemption or regulatory waiver, including from any regulatory oversight body required to operate specific programs (e.g., nursing) within the state.

Institutions that offer coursework by distance education through temporary distance education approval must disclose to current and enrolling students any coursework that will be offered by distance education through the end of the temporary approval period. New, prospective, and/or current students and faculty should be notified of the institution's plans to transition to residential (on-ground) delivery during the course of the program, including an approximate date when the institution expects the transition to occur.

ABHES will consider granting additional extensions of temporary distance education for new students starting after June 1, 2020, only on a case-by-case basis. To be considered, the institution must submit updated information in categories 1-5 above. In addition, the institution must provide a justification for the extension request that includes the following:

1. Evidence of a continuing exigency that prevents the institution from returning to residential delivery. This might include, for example, state and/or local social distancing or other requirements that prevent the institution from resuming customary residential operations.
2. Evidence of the institution's good faith efforts to meet the standards for distance education set forth in Chapter IX of the *ABHES Accreditation Manual*.
3. Evidence that the interests of students would be served by an additional extension of temporary distance education approval.

Institutions that have submitted formal distance education applications, but now wish, instead, to request an extension of temporary approval may do so by notifying ABHES in writing that the institution is withdrawing the previously submitted application. Please note that because the review process for these applications is already underway, the application fee will not be refunded.

**Requests for extended temporary approval must be submitted via email to [info@abhes.org](mailto:info@abhes.org) with the requested information to be submitted as a seamless Portable Document Format (.pdf) attachment with electronic bookmarks.** Please be sure to include the institution's ABHES ID# and "Extended Temporary Approval Request" in the email subject line.

### **Financial Statements and Compliance Audit Requirements**

Institutions accredited by ABHES must submit audited financial and other statements to the Commission within six months after the completion of their fiscal year or 30 days after an audit is released, whichever is earlier, in accordance with Chapter III, Section A, Subsection 10 of the *Accreditation Manual*.

Therefore, audited financial statements must be submitted via email to [financial@abhes.org](mailto:financial@abhes.org) per the deadlines indicated below:

Institution's Fiscal Year-end	Audited Financials Due Date
Between July 1 – December 31, 2019	No later than <b>June 30, 2020</b>
Between January 1 to June 30, 2020	No later than <b>December 31, 2020</b>

In accordance with the Department's May 15, 2020, guidance, an extension may be granted. **If an institution is unable to provide the required financial statements by the noted deadlines, it may seek an extension within 15 days of the deadline by emailing [financial@abhes.org](mailto:financial@abhes.org) and providing an explanation for the need of an extension.** The ABHES late fee will be waived. Please be sure to include the institution's ABHES ID# and school name in the email subject line.

### **Virtual Visits**

The Department announced temporary flexibilities that help accrediting agencies serve institutions and students through the period of COVID-19 interruption. The Department has determined that it is reasonable and prudent to permit virtual visits on a temporary basis. It should be noted that the Department is requiring that any accreditor employing a virtual site visit must also perform a follow-up, in-person visit to the campus to minimally view the campus facilities and interview students.

Therefore, ABHES is launching initiatives to establish a new policy regarding virtual site visits. ABHES anticipates conducting virtual visits to eligible institutions scheduled to undergo a visit in the next travel cycle (August through early November). ABHES will determine if, and under what conditions, it will perform virtual site visits during this temporary flexibility period. More details will be provided soon.

### **Questions**

Please contact ABHES staff with specific questions concerning your institution or program's compliance or accreditation. Please visit the [Our Staff](#) page on the ABHES website for specific staff member contact information. If you are unsure of where to direct your questions, please contact India Tips, Executive Director, at [itips@abhes.org](mailto:itips@abhes.org) or Amy Rowe, Associate Executive Director of Membership Services, at [arowe@abhes.org](mailto:arowe@abhes.org).