



Distance Delivery Confirmation Form

Confirmation of Institutional Eligibility for Distance Delivery Approval

In 2010, the Commission adopted new policies and definitions for distance delivery that affect all institutions, in part to comply with federal requirements governing such offerings (see below.) As a result of these changes, some institutions now have distance education or correspondence education offerings on record with the Commission that were not on record under the former policies and definitions. Because Commission approval is required for distance and correspondence education, the Commission must now review these institutions for the capacity to offer distance and correspondence education. The Commission will do so for each institution in a single review. Many of these reviews will be done via Commission staff desk review or peer panels; other reviews will require site visits.

Background Information on Distance Delivery¹

Higher Learning Commission (HLC) policies outline when institutions need to notify the Commission about distance-delivered instruction and when they need to seek approval. (See policy 3.2(a) and the information below.)

This document defines the characteristics of distance delivery, specifies when institutions must notify the Commission or seek approval for distance delivery, and provides the form for seeking approval.

Commission Definitions for Distance-Delivered Courses and Programs

The Higher Learning Commission uses the following definitions for the purpose of applying its policy on distance delivery to its accredited and candidate institutions:

- Distance-delivered **courses** are those in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.
- Distance-delivered **programs** are those certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered **courses**.

Reporting and Seeking Approval for Distance-Delivered Offerings

The chart below identifies the Percentage Brackets for determining the scope of distance delivery by an institution. The Commission determines the appropriate Percentage Bracket for each institution. Such determination is based on information provided by the institution in its Annual Institutional Data Update to the Commission or when it seeks and receives approval of a proposed change.

Percentage Bracket	Percentage of Distance-Delivered Offerings (calculations are based on degree programs, not certificates)
3	Up to 100% of total degree programs
2	Up to 20% of total degree programs
1	Initiation of distance-delivered offerings up to 5% of total degree programs
0	No degree programs or more than four certificate programs (Commission policy does permit the institution to offer up to four certificate programs as well as a limited number of courses leading to degree programs through distance education or correspondence education without seeking prior approval.)

Higher Learning Commission policy requires an institution to seek the Commission's prior approval if the institution plans to **initiate** or **expand** its distance-delivered offerings as described below. When initiation or expansion is anticipated, an institution must submit a substantive change request using the form contained in this document.

Initiation occurs and a review is required when the institution:

- plans to initiate its first distance education degree program, even when it has been approved to offer distance education certificates or correspondence education degree programs or certificates;
- plans to initiate its first correspondence education degree program, even when it has been approved to offer correspondence education certificates or distance education degree programs or certificates;
- has initiated four distance education certificates and plans to initiate a fifth, unless the institution has already been reviewed and approved to offer one or more distance education degree programs; or
- has initiated four correspondence education certificates and plans to initiate a fifth, unless the institution has already been reviewed and approved to offer one or more correspondence education degree programs.

Expansion occurs and a review is required when the institution:

- plans to increase its current activity in distance education degree programs or its current activity in correspondence education degree programs to a higher Percentage Bracket.

In addition, the Commission may require a substantive change evaluation if the institution:

- has never had a focused review of distance or correspondence degree or certificate programs and is offering one or more programs or five or more certificates; or
- has a significant annual increase in enrollment.

In addition to reviewing distance-delivered courses and programs through its substantive change processes, the Commission evaluates distance delivery whenever it comprehensively reviews an institution. In these comprehensive reviews, the Commission examines the institution's capacity to provide education to its students and the quality of its performance in doing so, whether via distance delivery or traditional face-to-face modes. Comprehensive reviews examine curriculum, staffing, support services, access to appropriate laboratory and library resources, and all other facets of quality higher education.

Questions

For general questions on approval of distance-delivered programs, send an e-mail to changerequests@hlcommission.org or call 800-621-7440 x137. For institution-specific questions, contact the

Commission staff liaison assigned to the institution by calling 800-621-7440 and asking to be transferred to the liaison.

¹ Wherever distance delivery is mentioned throughout this document it means distance or correspondence delivery. The following are the Federal definitions (2009) of distance and correspondence education:

Correspondence education means:

- (1) Education provided through one or more courses 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.
- (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
- (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.
- (4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

Distance Education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include:

- (1) The internet;
- (2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- (3) Audio conferencing; or
- (4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

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Submitting the Distance Delivery Confirmation of Eligibility Form

Answers to the questions below will constitute the documentation needed for the Commission to confirm the institution's eligibility for distance delivery approval.

The questions are designed to elicit brief, succinct, detailed information, rather than a narrative or references to extensive supporting documents. Do not attach other documents unless they are specifically requested in the questions. The total submission should be no more than 8-10 pages. Submit the completed application as a single electronic document (in Adobe PDF format) emailed to changerequests@hlcommission.org.

Institution: University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point _____ **City, State:** Stevens Point, WI_

Name of person completing this application: Greg Summers _____

Title: Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Phone: 715-346-4686 _____ **Email:** gsummers@uwsp.edu _____

Date: January 11, 2013 _____

Approval of distance education offerings Approval of correspondence education offerings

Part 1. Institutional Context

1. Is the institution, in its relations with other regional, specialized, or national accrediting agencies, currently under or recommended for a negative status or action (e.g., withdrawal, probation, sanction, warning, or show-cause, etc.)?	NO	
2. Is the institution now undergoing or facing substantial monitoring, special review, or financial restrictions from the U.S. Dept. of Education or other federal or state government agencies?	NO	
3. Has the institution's senior leadership or Board membership experienced substantial resignations or removals in the past year?	NO	

4. Is the institution experiencing financial difficulty through such conditions as a currently declared state of exigency, a deficit of 10% or more, or a default or failure to make payroll during the past year, or consecutive deficits in the two most recent years?	NO	
5. Is the institution experiencing other pressures that might affect its ability to carry out the proposal (e.g., a collective bargaining dispute or a significant lawsuit)?	NO	

Part 2. Characteristics of the Change Requested

6. What percentage of the institution’s total degree programs is currently offered through distance delivery (see page 1 for the Commission’s definition of distance-delivered programs)? **Please specify the percentage offered by distance education AND the percentage offered by correspondence education.**

UW-Stevens Point currently offers 10% of the institution’s total degree programs through distance education. (We have no correspondence courses.)

7. What organizational structures are in place to ensure effective oversight, implementation, and management of the institution’s distance-delivered offerings?

UW-Stevens Point’s distance-delivered offerings are administered just as our regular face-to-face academic programs are. That is, they are administered by the academic programs and colleges that offer the curricula, they are subject to exactly the same academic policies regarding registration, fee structure, grading, academic misconduct, teaching evaluation, assessment of student learning, etc.

8. Does the institution have a separately identified organizational unit for providing or marketing the distance-delivered offerings? () Yes (X) No

If yes, please explain how this separate unit coordinates with other academic and administrative units across the institution to ensure the consistency and quality of offerings.

9. If the institution has any involvement by external organizations (other than accredited higher education institutions) in key operations as identified below, provide the information requested for each involvement. (Note that such involvement by a parent company or by one of its subsidiaries external to the institution in any of these operations should be reported.)

Type of involvement	Name(s) of external organization(s)	% of Involvement
A. Support for delivery of instruction	N/A	
B. Recruitment and admission of students	N/A	
C. Course placement and advising of students	N/A	
D. Design and oversight of	N/A	

curriculum		
E. Direct instruction and oversight	N/A	

10. If the institution has any involvement with other accredited higher education institutions in key operations identified above, provide the name(s) of the other institutions and the nature of the involvement.

N/A

11. Operational Data

Operational Data	2011-12 (actual tallies)	2012-13 (estimate)	2013-14 (projected)
A. Total annual (academic year + summer) student credit hours generated	248393	250877	253386
B. Total annual student credit hours generated in distance-delivered sections (if available)	8632	8718	8806
C. Percentage of student credit hours in distance-delivered courses (B/C, or B divided by A, rounded up to the nearest integer)	3%	3%	3%
D. Total number of academic programs (i.e., counting different majors at all levels)	69	69	69
E. Total number of programs in item D above available via distance delivery (i.e., 50% or more of courses available as distance-delivered courses)	7	7	7
F. Percentage of programs available via distance delivery (100 x E/D)	10%	10%	10%

Part 3. Institution’s History with Distance-Delivered Offerings

12. Briefly describe the institution’s experience with distance-delivered offerings.

UW-Stevens Point has only recently developed a small number of distance-delivered programs. We began experimenting with online offerings in the late 1990s. More recently, the University of Wisconsin System adopted Desire2Learn as its online course platform and made this available to system campuses. Since then, our online and hybrid course offerings have grown, but we remained slow to develop programs that were fully online. The recently approved Health and Wellness Management degree completion program and the Health Information Management and Technology degree completion program (both of which were approved by HLC within the past two years) represent our first major step into online education at the program level. The programs are each offered collaboratively among four partner UW System institutions.

13. If the Higher Learning Commission approves the institution’s initiation or expansion of distance delivery,

what future growth does the institution anticipate (e.g., in the next six months, three years, 10-20 years)?

Future expansion of online education in the near term (1-3 years) is likely to be modest. UW-Stevens Point has established a new Distance Education Committee to develop a strategic plan for online and distance education. A report with recommendations is expected by fall 2013. Until this report is received, it is impossible to predict longer term expansion.

14. How does the institution plan to manage this growth?

Given the modest expansion suggested above, managing this growth is not likely to present substantial difficulties. UW-Stevens Point continues to rely on Desire2Learn as its online course platform, a platform that is adequately supported and maintained by UW System.

Part 4. Institutional Planning for Distance-Delivered Offerings

15. What concerns or expected improvements identified in previous Commission evaluations are applicable to distance delivery and how has the institution addressed them? (If none were raised, simply state "None.")

UW-Stevens Point recently had a focused visit by the HLC to evaluate our assessment of student learning. The focused visit was successful, and we received a positive review on the progress we have made. We have been asked to provide a further written progress report by January 2015. This covers all assessment of student learning in all academic programs, including those that may be online.

16. How does the institution determine the need for a distance-delivered offerings? How does the institution decide whether traditional programs should be offered via distance delivery?

Currently, these decisions are made at the department and college level. Campus-level procedures for making these determinations are being created by the new Distance Education Committee referred to above, and these should be developed by fall 2013.

17. How does the institution plan the role of distance delivery at the institution; i.e., for changes and future expansion of distance delivery? Who is involved? How do new ideas and initiatives originate, and how are they examined and evaluated?

As with number 16 above, most such planning originates in the academic departments and colleges in consultation with the provost's office. New ideas and initiatives are evaluated under the same robust faculty governance review procedures as traditional face-to-face programs.

18. How does the institution ensure that financial planning and budgeting for distance-delivered offerings are realistic? What are the institution's projected revenues and expenses?

Financial Planning and budgeting for online courses and academic programs takes place in the academic departments and colleges in consultation with the provost's office. The provost's office is coordinating the effort to gain compliance with state authorization rules relative to distance education, and to deal with any related costs associated with gaining this permission.

19. How does the institution assure that promotion, marketing, and enrollment of its distance-delivered offerings stay in balance with its actual resources and technical capabilities?

To date, UW-Stevens Point has done very little marketing of any academic programs, including those distance delivered programs, beyond what is available on the university's website and online course catalog. The one exception to this is the marketing associated with our new, collaborative online programs in Health and Wellness Management and Health Information and Management Technology, the marketing of which is funded and coordinated by UW Extension. See the response to number 20 below.

20. What controls are in place to ensure that the information presented to students in advertising, brochures, and other communications will be accurate?

As explained in number 19 above, this question is really only relevant to our new, collaborative online programs in Health and Wellness Management (HWM) and Health Information and Management Technology (HIMT), both of which are coordinated by UW Extension. Administrative oversight to ensure both accuracy and consistency in communication with students is therefore provided through UW-Extension. The HWM and HIMT programs will each have an academic director at each of the four institutions involved in offering courses. Likewise, each has a dedicated program manager housed at UW-Extension who works in concert with academic directors and student services staff at the four partner institutions to provide general program information, problem resolution, and career advising online, by phone, or in person. The HWM and HIMT program managers are in close contact with the enrolled students and with the academic directors to provide the hands-on, active support that has been shown to be important for adult and non-traditional learners.

Part 5. Curriculum and Instructional Design

21. How does the institution assure good instructional design in its distance-delivered offerings? How are the institution's faculty and quality control mechanisms involved in the instructional design process?

For roughly a decade, UW-Stevens Point has run a Curricular Redesign Seminar each summer to introduce faculty to the Desire2Learn online course platform and provide professional development in best-practice instructional design for online and hybrid course offerings. This process has provided a strong mechanism for quality control in online instruction.

22. What processes and procedures does the institution use for technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, remote services, and for communicating changes in software, hardware or technical systems to students and faculty?

UW-Stevens Point has a strong Information Technology program that provides technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, and remote services for in-class and distance delivered instruction. As noted earlier, UW System maintains Desire2Learn as a statewide online course platform and is responsible for all related hardware and software upgrades. Servers to support this platform are all maintained centrally in Madison, WI.

23. How does the institution assure that it provides convenient, reliable, and timely services to students or faculty needing technical assistance, and how does it communicate information about these services?

UW-Stevens Point maintains an Information Technology Help Desk available to students, faculty, and staff for all questions related to instructional technology. The Help Desk is centrally located in the university library for convenient access and also available by phone.

24. What is the institution's experience, if any, in collaborating with other institutions or organizations to provide distance-delivered education?

As already noted, UW-Stevens Point is involved in two collaborative online programs in Health and Wellness Management (HWM) and Health Information and Management Technology (HIMT), both of which are coordinated by UW Extension. Both programs are offered collaborative by UW-Stevens Point and three other UW institutions. These collaborations have already been approved previously by HLC, both within the past two years.

25. If the institution engages in partnerships or agreements with external organizations or institutions as identified in Questions 9 and 10, how does the institution ensure that students can use these services effectively?

N/A

Part 6. Institutional Staffing and Faculty Support

26. How does the institution staff distance-delivered offerings? How does this differ from the institution's processes for staffing traditional offerings?

Staffing of online programs is handled by the academic departments and colleges in consultation with the provost's office and is handled in exactly the same manner as the staffing of traditional courses.

27. What is the institution's process for selecting, training, and orienting faculty for distance delivery? What special professional development, support, or released time does the institution provide for faculty who teach distance-delivered offerings?

As already noted, for roughly a decade, UW-Stevens Point has run a Curricular Redesign Seminar each summer to introduce faculty to the Desire2Learn online course platform and provide professional development in best-practice instructional design for online and hybrid course offerings. Released time is provided for course development on an ad hoc basis by academic departments and colleges.

28. How does the institution assure copyright compliance and keep distance delivery faculty aware of institutional policies on using others' intellectual property?

Copyright compliance and policies related to intellectual property are communicated through the Curricular Redesign Seminar noted above. Information is also made available through the university's library, Information Technology Office, and Academic Affairs.

Part 7. Student Support

29. How does the institution assure that distance delivery students have access to necessary student and support services (e.g., institutional information, application for admission, registration, tutoring or academic support, advising, financial aid, tuition payment, career counseling and placement, library resources, complaint processes)? How does the institution provide them information about using these services, and how does it monitor and evaluate their use of these services?

Students in online classes have access to the same support services as those students in traditional courses. Instructors are required to be available for students in their distance courses either by phone, email, or online office hours. In addition, in the university's two online degree completion programs (the HWM and HIMT programs described above) UW Extension has a dedicated student support team for each collaborative program that it manages. The team is responsible for helping students navigate through the University bureaucracy and for providing success coaching. In terms of the latter, the team contacts students by phone, email, Skype, and other media several times each semester to check-in with them, and to help resolve any problems that they might be having. The team also connects students in the program with campus-based resources on the students' home campuses as needed.

30. How does the institution measure and promote interactions among distance delivery students and faculty (e.g., email, online chats, discussion groups, phone or streaming audio, "office hours," cyber buddies/mentors and tutors)?

Information Technology makes available a variety of tools to promote interaction among students and faculty in online courses. In addition to basic email service, within Desire2Learn are tools for synchronous and asynchronous online discussions and chats, including tools for grouping students within a course. In addition, Information Technology can assist faculty to incorporate streaming audio and video, web conferencing, online office hours, etc. Desire2Learn has also recently introduced new analytics tools for measuring student interactions in online courses.

31. How does the institution assure that the distance delivery students it enrolls and to whom it awards credit and credentials are the same ones who did the work and achieved the institution's learning goals (student authentication)?

All of UW-Stevens Point's online courses are taught through Desire2Learn, and all courses in Desire2Learn require students to provide their university username and password to gain access to course material, assignments, quizzes, and discussions. The platform provides a secure and password-protected online environment.

32. How does the institution protect student identity and personal information?

UW-Stevens Point routinely screens office computers to remove sensitive information, including Social Security numbers and other personal data related to students. In addition, as noted above, all courses in Desire2Learn require students to provide their university username and password to gain access to course material, assignments, quizzes, and discussions. The platform provides a secure and password-protected online environment.

Part 8. Evaluation and Assessment

33. How does the institution assess, review, and evaluate quality in distance-delivered offerings?

Online programs at UW-Stevens Point are subject to the same assessment procedures for the evaluation of student learning as our traditional classes. Individual courses are assessed at the department level. Academic programs are monitored by a university-level Assessment Subcommittee within faculty governance and must be evaluated on a five-year rotating cycle.

34. How are the measures and techniques the institution uses for distance-delivered offerings equivalent to those used to assess and evaluate traditional offerings? If there are differences, why are these differences appropriate?

The measurements and techniques used to evaluate student learning are determined by the academic departments offering the curricula and monitored by the university's Assessment Subcommittee. The instruments used depend necessarily on the particular course and its content.

35. How does the institution assess the learning of the students it educates in its distance-delivered offerings to ensure that they achieve the levels of performance that the institution expects and that its stakeholders require?

See the response to number 33 above. Note also that UW-Stevens Point recently had a favorable review by the HLC in a focused visit aimed at evaluating our assessment of student learning.

36. How does the institution encourage and ensure continuous improvement of its distance-delivered offerings?

Again, see the response to number 33 above.

Questions? E-mail changerequests@hlcommission.org or call 800.621.7440 ext. 137 or 139