

Approval of Distance Education and Off-Campus Courses and Programs

Public institutions have guidelines explained in Coordinating Board rules that govern certain types of instruction provided through distance education. For instance, academic credit on-line and hybrid courses, degree and certificate programs, and self-supporting courses and programs (formerly defined as extension courses and programs) provided by all public institutions of higher education, and formula-funded workforce continuing education provided by a public community college, Lamar State College, or public technical college are governed by [Chapter 4, Subchapter P](#), of Board Rules. That subchapter *does not* apply to non-credit adult and continuing education courses provided by a senior college or university or a health-related institution, or non-formula-funded continuing education provided by a public community college, Lamar State College, or public technical college. Information related to the approval of off-campus face-to-face and electronic-to-groups courses and programs and self-supporting courses and programs for public institutions can be found in [Chapter 4, Subchapter Q](#), of Board rules.

Institutional Plan for Distance Education

Before institutions offer any distance education courses or programs **for the first time**, an *Institutional Plan for Distance Education* must be submitted to the Coordinating Board. To clarify, the plan must be submitted by institutions who have *never* offered distance education, such as newly created institutions. The Commissioner of Higher Education may require institutions to provide supplemental reports on distance education programs and/or courses.

Each *Institutional Plan for Distance Education* should reflect institutional academic and administrative policies that express commitment to maintain the quality of distance education courses and programs and should conform to Coordinating Board guidelines, including the [Principles of Good Practice](#), as well as criteria set out by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. These criteria shall include provisions relating to:

- Institutional Issues;
- Educational Programs;
- Faculty;
- Student Support Services; and
- Distance Education Facilities and Support

Board rules cover standards and criteria for [distance education programs](#), [courses](#) and [faculty](#). Each program and/or course must comply with the following:

- Be within the role and mission of the offering institution, and be on the inventory of approved programs/courses;
- Any offered degree or certificate program shall comply with the standards and criteria of any specialized accrediting agency;
- Courses shall meet the quality standards applicable to on-campus courses;
- Programs shall be approved by the institution's governing board or the governing board's designee;
- Doctoral or first-professional degree programs may not be offered via distance education unless specifically approved by the Coordinating Board;

- The instructor of record has the responsibility for the delivery of instruction and for evaluation of student progress; and,
- Institutions shall report, in accordance with Board policy and procedures, all distance education courses and programs.

Prior board approval may be required before institutions may offer programs in certain subject area disciplines.

Additional criteria and standards associated with faculty teaching distance education are:

- Faculty shall be selected and evaluated using the same standards and procedures used for on-campus faculty;
- Institutions shall provide training and support to those faculty teaching distance education courses; and,
- The supervision and monitoring processes shall be the same as those for on-campus faculty.

Notification Procedures for Off-Campus Upper-Division and Graduate Courses and Programs (excluding doctoral and special professional programs)

Universities and health-related institutions shall notify all area institutions, Higher Education Centers, and the Coordinating Board of their plans to offer distance education courses and programs.

*Notification procedures for off-campus programs
(excluding doctoral and special professional degrees)*

An institution proposing a distance education degree program must have approval to offer the program. If an institution does not have approval, [instructions](#) for securing program approval may be found on the Coordinating Board website.

Baccalaureate degree completion programs in which over half of the courses are offered via distance education are, for the purposes of notification, considered a distance education program. Thus, when determining whether or not a baccalaureate degree completion is a distance education program, institutions should examine the percentage of coursework offered via distance education that is a part of the completion program, including any core curriculum courses, electives, and other required courses. These programs should follow notification procedures below.

For programs that are to be delivered electronically-to-individuals (i.e., online), notification should take the form of an email to Dr. Van L. Davis (Van.Davis@thehb.state.tx.us) and Dr. Andrew B. Lofters (andrew.lofters@thehb.state.tx.us) and should include a pdf of the signed [Certification Form for Off-Campus and Electronically Delivered Programs](#). The notification email should include program level and name, CIP code, and implementation date. Notification should take place at least 60 days prior to the proposed program implementation.

For programs that are to be delivered electronically-to-groups or off-campus face-to-face, notification should take the form of an email to Dr. Van L. Davis (Van.Davis@thehb.state.tx.us) and Dr. Andrew B. Lofters (andrew.lofters@thehb.state.tx.us) and should include a pdf of the signed [Certification Form for Off-Campus and Electronically Delivered Programs](#). In addition to Coordinating Board notification, institutions should also notify all public institutions of higher education, including Higher Education Centers, within a 50-mile radius of the proposed delivery site via email with a copy to Dr. Van L. Davis (Van.Davis@thehb.state.tx.us). Notification should take place at least 60 days prior to the proposed program implementation. Once notified, institutions shall have 30 days to file an objection. The objection should be made via email to the offering institution, with copies to the Coordinating Board staff previously mentioned. Institutions are encouraged to make every effort to resolve disputes on their own. If such a resolution isn't possible, the Commissioner has the authority to resolve disputes between institutions regarding the offering of courses and programs and has the authority to approve or disapprove such courses or programs. The Commissioner will then report to area institutions on approvals and disapprovals of disputed courses and programs. The Board may hear appeals to approvals and disapprovals made by the Commissioner. Approval for the program is considered automatic if no objections are made. Once approved, it will not be necessary to provide notification when courses which are part of that program are to be offered.

Notification procedures for off-campus courses

For electronic-to-group or off-campus face-to-face and self-supporting courses, the parent institution shall notify all public institutions of higher education and Higher Education Centers within a 50-mile radius of the proposed delivery site by email at least 60 days prior to the proposed first class day. A copy of the notification should be emailed to Dr. Van L. Davis (Van.Davis@thehb.state.tx.us) Dr. Andrew B. Lofters (andrew.lofters@thehb.state.tx.us). Once notified, institutions shall have 30 days to file an objection. The objection should be made via email to the offering institution, with copies to the Coordinating Board staff previously mentioned. Institutions are encouraged to make every effort to resolve disputes on their own. If such a resolution isn't possible, the Commissioner has the authority to resolve disputes between institutions regarding the offering of courses and programs and has the authority to approve or disapprove such courses or programs. The Commissioner will then report to area institutions on approvals and disapprovals of disputed courses and programs. The Board may hear appeals to approvals and disapprovals made by the Commissioner. Institutions are not required to provide notification for courses that are a part of approved distance education degree programs. Notification is also not required for electronic-to- individual (i.e., online) courses.

Higher Education Regional Councils and Notification Procedures for All Off-Campus Lower-Division Courses and Programs

There are ten Higher Education Regional Councils in Texas that consist of the universities, community colleges, technical colleges, and Lamar State Colleges within that region. These Regional Councils correspond to the ten Uniform State Service Regions. The purpose of the Higher Education Regional Councils is to advise the Commissioner on appropriate policies and procedures for the effective state-level administration of off-campus lower-division instruction. The Regional Councils are also expected to help facilitate inter-institutional cooperation in the conduct of off-campus instruction and to encourage excellence in the conduct of off-campus lower-division instruction.

The membership of each Regional Council is comprised of the presidents or designated representative of each public and independent institution with its main campus within the region. A Council Chair is elected by the members. The term of service for the Council Chair is also determined by the members. Regional Councils are expected to meet annually each spring to perform their designated duties. Any business that arises during other times of the year may be conducted electronically at the discretion of the Council Chair.

The responsibilities of the Regional Councils include:

- Reviewing the proposed off-campus lower-division course and program offerings of each member public institution as presented in their Off-Campus Instruction Plans. Regional Councils may review additional courses not originally included in the Off-Campus Instruction Plan proposed by institutions after the regular annual meeting through a format of the Chair's choosing which can include electronic and/or telephonic deliberations.
- Assuring that each institution in the region receives notification of all off-campus lower-division courses and programs proposed to be offered in the Region by any other public institution, and to provide each public institution in the Region full opportunity to review and comment on the plans of other public institutions, excluding dual credit courses.
- Resolving any disputes associated with the proposed off-campus lower-division course offerings, excluding dual credit. If a resolution cannot be reached or an institution wishes to appeal the Regional Council's resolution, the Commissioner has the authority to resolve disputes between institutions regarding the offering of courses and has the authority to approve or disapprove such courses as well as the approval or disapproval of Off-Campus Instruction Plans. The Commissioner will then report to area institutions on approvals and disapprovals of disputed courses and programs. The Board may hear appeals to approvals and disapprovals made by the Commissioner.
- Studying cooperatively the various methods of providing lower-division off-campus instruction, and promoting the use of those methods which support quality and promise the most effective and efficient use of state resources.

Regional Councils are also expected to provide the Coordinating Board with the following documentation within fourteen days following each annual meeting:

- Procedures and guidelines for reviewing Off-Campus Instruction Plans;
- Minutes from the annual meeting;
- The member public institutions' Off-Campus Instruction Plans;
- The member public institutions' off-campus dual credit offerings; and
- Contact information for the Council Chair, including term of service, and a roster of Council members.

All off-campus lower-division courses and programs offered by community colleges, universities, health-related institutions, public technical colleges, and Lamar State Colleges shall be reviewed by the Higher Education Regional Council serving each site proposed to receive instruction, except for the following courses:

- Off-campus lower-division courses and programs offered by a community college within its service area;

- Off-campus lower-division dual credit courses offered by a university, health-related institution, public technical college, and/or Lamar State College that have been requested by a school district and/or high school;
- Off-campus lower division dual credit courses offered by a community college at a high school outside of the college's service area that have been requested by the school district because the local public community college is unable to provide the requested course to the satisfaction of the school district. A public community college proposing to offer a dual credit course at a high school outside of the college's service area shall notify the Regional Council in whose service area the high school is located. The college must provide a letter from the school district stating that the local community college is not offering the proposed dual credit course to the satisfaction of the school district and that the school district has invited the other community college to offer the course; and
- Off-campus (or out of service district) lower division clinical courses which meet all of the following conditions:
 - The student(s) enrolled in the clinical course is already employed by the clinical facility where the course is being taken.
 - The clinical facility provides the institution of higher education offering the course with written verification that there will be no reduction in the number of clinical opportunities available for use by area institutions.
 - The institution of higher education offering the course shall notify the appropriate Regional Council(s) and provide the Regional Council(s) with the written verification from the clinical facility.

An Off-Campus Instruction Plan must be submitted to the Regional Council by each public institution of higher education that is planning to offer off-campus lower-division courses, clinicals, and/or programs in that region. The Plan should include a listing of all off-campus lower-division course offerings, lower-division programs, and clinical sites as well as the following information:

- The semester, course number, name, day, meeting time, and location of delivery for each off-campus lower-division face-to-face or electronic-to-group course;
- The facility name and addresses for clinical sites; and
- The name and location of delivery for off-campus lower-division face-to-face or electronic-to-group programs.

NOTE: Electronic-to-individual courses (whether they be delivered via the internet or iTV) should not be included on the Off-Campus Instruction Plan.

In addition to submitting its Off-Campus Instruction Plan to the Regional Council in which an institution resides, public institutions are also responsible for notifying the chair of each Regional Council in which they are planning to offer off-campus lower-division courses and programs of those proposed offerings, even if they are not subject to Regional Council review. This notification should be made prior to the Regional Council's annual meeting. For those courses and programs that are subject to Regional Council review, the Council shall return a recommendation for approval or disapproval to the originating institution as well as provide both the institution's request and the Regional Council's recommendation to the Coordinating Board.

Although dual credit courses are no longer subject to Regional Council review, all off-campus face-to-face or electronic-to-group dual credit courses must be reported to the Regional Council, including off-campus or electronic-to-group dual credit courses offered by a community college within its service area. Dual credit courses offered on an institution of higher education's campus or offered electronically to individuals are not required to be reported. When reporting dual credit courses, institutions should provide the following information:

- Course number;
- Course name;
- Number of sections; and
- Location of delivery.

Questions regarding Regional Councils may be directed to Dr. Andrew B. Lofters, andrew.lofters@theccb.state.tx.us.

Distance Education and Off-Campus Doctoral and Special Professional Programs

All doctoral and special professional programs delivered at a distance require prior Coordinating Board approval. A program is considered to be offered through distance education and/or off-campus delivery when over half of the semester credit hours, excluding dissertation and research, may be completed without the student being in residence on campus.

The Coordinating Board expects all doctoral and special professional programs delivered through distance education to meet the following standards:

- The program is of high quality;
- It is delivered in a way that preserves this high quality;
- The program meets a well-documented state need; and
- The program can be delivered at a reasonable cost.

An institution proposing a doctoral or special professional program for distance delivery must have approval to offer the program. (If an institution does not have approval, a [substantive program proposal](#) must be submitted.) For institutions wishing to deliver an existing on-campus doctoral or special professional program as a distance education program, the on-campus program must be in good standing with all appropriate review and accreditation organizations. Additionally, the combined enrollments of an on-campus doctoral program and the distance delivery doctoral program must be sufficient to permit the program's successful continuation. If a decision is made to phase out either program, arrangements must be made to allow students to complete the program in the most expedient and appropriate manner.

New distance education doctoral or special professional proposals must be submitted to the Coordinating Board using the [Distance Doctoral Submission form](#) and must be submitted through the appropriate institutional and system administrative channels. If the proposed program is to be offered electronically-to-groups or off-campus face-to-face, institutions must notify all public institutions of higher education within a 50-mile radius of the proposed delivery site at the time the proposal is submitted to the Coordinating Board. A copy of the notification should be emailed to Dr. Van L. Davis (van.davis@theccb.state.tx.us) and Dr. Andrew B. Lofters (andrew.lofters@theccb.state.tx.us). Once notified, institutions shall have 30 days to file an

objection. The objection should be made via email to the offering institution, with copies to the Coordinating Board staff previously mentioned

Once submitted the following steps occur:

- Coordinating Board staff will review the proposal and, if appropriate, forward to the Distance Education Advisory Committee for review;
- The Distance Education Advisory Committee shall review proposals and make recommendations; and
- Based upon those recommendations the Commissioner shall decide if the proposal will be forwarded to the Coordinating Board for consideration at one of its quarterly meetings.

Institutions that have received permission to offer off-campus electronic-to-groups or face-to-face doctoral programs may add additional delivery sites by submitting the [Additional Delivery Site Approval form](#) through appropriate institutional and system administrative channels. At that time all institutions of higher education within a 50-mile radius of the proposed delivery site must also be notified of the proposal. A copy of the notification should be emailed to Dr. Van L. Davis (van.davis@thehb.state.tx.us) and Dr. Andrew B. Lofters (andrew.lofters@thehb.state.tx.us). Once notified, institutions shall have 30 days to file an objection. The objection should be made via email to the offering institution, with copies to the Coordinating Board staff previously mentioned. The decision to approve additional delivery sites may be made by the Commissioner or his designee after review by Coordinating Board staff.

Institutions that have previously approved distance education doctoral and special professional degree programs may request permission to offer those programs via other distance education delivery modes. In order to do so, an institution should submit a new [Distance Doctoral Submission form](#) through appropriate institutional and system administrative channels. If the change would result in new off-campus face-to-face or electronic-to-groups delivery sites, all institutions of higher education within a 50-mile radius of the proposed delivery sites must also be notified of the proposal. The decision to approve additional delivery modalities may be made by the Commissioner or his designee after review by Coordinating Board staff and the Distance Education Advisory Committee.

A limited number of doctoral and special professional courses may be delivered without distance doctoral program approval. As with other off-campus courses, these also require notification of area institutions. Additionally, institutions must provide notification to the Coordinating Board when more than four courses are offered via distance education in a single degree program.