

ACES GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE INSTRUCTION IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION*

ACES Technology Interest Network
(1999)

COURSE QUALITY:

- 1. The course must offer, at a minimum, an equivalent educational opportunity to that provided in a traditional course. This should include equality in the domains of information, skill building, and course evaluation.**

Discussion: Distance learning offerings should be held accountable to the same standards for quality as traditional courses. Objectives which cannot be maintained at the same level, and which cannot be reasonably modified or replaced with equivalent objectives, should be delivered in a traditional format.

- 2. Specific course content must be amenable to effective delivery in the manner proposed.**

Discussion: Some courses may readily lend themselves to many distance learning formats. Other courses may lend themselves to only a limited range of formats, while some may not be appropriate for distance delivery. In deciding when and how to deliver instruction outside of a traditional framework, faculty should focus on specific objectives, and determine the best manner in which to meet each group of learning objectives.

- 3. Reasonable efforts must be taken by the institution to ensure that the student has been responsible for course work submitted.**

Discussion: Some arrangement needs to be made to attempt to ensure that the registered student has completed the required course work. This does not necessarily mean that every course will require some direct meeting, but at some point a direct meeting where the identity of the student can be verified, and a thorough evaluation of all distance courses and student learning can be completed should be included. One alternative may be to use proctored exams which can be administered at distance sites.

- 4. Distance learning courses must provide an opportunity for the students to be actively engaged in a learning process beyond simply reviewing text-based material, if the parallel traditional course provides opportunities beyond the review of text-based materials.**

Discussion: Current learning theory suggests that appropriate education of adults involves opportunities to process information, formulate solutions to real world problems, and apply abstract theoretical models to specific settings and situations. Traditional classrooms provide opportunity for student interaction, social construction of knowledge and human contact that cannot be replicated simply by reviewing text materials. Distance learning offerings need to carefully consider how to replicate these experiences to provide a broad range of learning opportunity.

- 5. Distance learning courses should not be limited to a recreation of a traditional face-to-face course but should be specifically designed to take advantage of educational opportunities provided by the medium used to deliver the course.**

Discussion: To provide the most effective educational opportunities available, instructors must fully utilize the tools available to them, and build upon the strength of each tool utilized. Advanced technology offers the opportunity to develop new approaches to learning that take full advantage of the technology to move beyond what has been done in the past.

- 6. The differential impact on student learning which is likely to occur to those students taught in a distance fashion must be considered, and any potential problems must be guarded against or steps for redemption provided.**

Discussion: It is unclear at the current time if distance education approaches are equal in all respects to more traditional instructional settings. In some cases, students may gain more, while in others they may gain less. To ensure appropriate educational standards, a range of potential outcomes should be assessed including skills, knowledge, attitudes, personal development, and professional orientation. Distance courses should meet the needs of students in each domain, or steps must be taken to ensure that student's needs in those domains not met through distance education are met in an alternative format.

7. In those cases where distance classes provide for a meeting opportunity for students, the meeting environment should be one that is supportive of and conducive to the educational process.

Discussion: Not all physical environments meet the needs for educational meetings. If groups of students are meeting in a face-to-face setting, the physical space provided must be adequately designed and equipped to meet the specific needs of the learning group.

8. As in all courses at the University level, issues of equity and diversity should be addressed and promoted in a distance environment.

Discussion: A variety of variables influence individual students' communication styles, learning needs, and behavioral patterns. Approaches to distance education may not meet the needs of all students, and the instructor and institution involved have a responsibility to monitor student behavior, learning, and communication to ensure that individual needs are met, and individual differences are recognized as strengths and, as appropriate, built upon.

COURSE CONTENT/OBJECTIVES:

9. Distance based classes should be designed to meet a specific need.

Discussion: Distance education opportunities should be judiciously and wisely chosen to meet a specific set of needs. The availability of technology does not dictate its use anymore than the availability of medication suggests it is the best response to all clients. By focusing on specific needs and working to meet these, institutions can ensure that distance offerings are beneficial.

10. Because counseling courses often involve the exchange of sensitive information about clients and students, security precautions need to be implemented and enforced that ensure appropriate protection of this information.

Discussion: Client and Student confidentiality will be maintained via methods such as, but not limited to, data encryption, pseudonym use, password protection on various access levels to the Internet and other communication programs, and a method of security for the verification of postal delivery of sensitive information.

11. If the objectives for a specific distance class are different than those for an on-campus class, then appropriate steps must be taken to ensure that every distance student receives appropriate redemption to meet all objectives.

Discussion: Programs which provide opportunities for students to learn at a distance must ensure that the educational opportunities provided for all students are equivalent. In some cases, certain objectives may not be appropriately addressed through some distance modalities. In those cases, equivalent opportunities may be provided through alternative formats to ensure student success.

12. Appropriate procedures for evaluation of student learning must be implemented.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT:

13. Students must have access to equivalent educational supports including library resources, tutorial assistance, and access to the course instructor.

Discussion: The University experience expands beyond the walls of the individual classroom, and the information provided in a text. A variety of support materials, ancillary contacts and personal relationships are successfully combined in a well balanced academic environment. Care must be taken to move beyond simply providing class lectures or reading material on-line to incorporating the entirety of the academic experience that the student otherwise would have in a traditional setting.

14. Students must be provided with the opportunity to receive complete training in the technology prior to being required to use the technology and should be provided with ongoing support throughout the educational experience.

Discussion: Just as faculty cannot be expected to maintain currency in all aspects of technology, neither can students. Clear expectations should be established prior to enrollment in a course about the student's competencies in relation to the use of specific technology. If students who are enrolled do not meet these competencies, then it is the responsibility of the institution to provide training and support to help students in those areas where skills and knowledge are lacking. If during the period of time that a student is receiving instruction the interface, technological demands, or other aspects of technology change, the institution must take reasonable steps to ensure that students are trained/retrained to adequately handle these changes. Institutions have a responsibility to provide adequate support services that can be readily accessed to resolve student difficulties that result from a lack of knowledge or skills, changes in software or equipment, software or equipment malfunction, or other circumstances over which the institution has control or responsibility

15. Financial resources must be available to meet the needs of the distance learning activities.

Discussion: Institutions should be aware prior to undertaking distance based educational offerings that standard methods of calculating the institutions financial commitment and needs may not be applicable to new modalities. In all cases, institutions must, in advance, make the necessary financial commitment to ensure that student needs are met

16. Students must be provided with adequate access to faculty in a timely fashion.

Discussion: This may occur through the use of specific electronic media as long as students have been provided the opportunity for appropriate training.

17. The specific purpose and outcomes of a distance delivery method is to be explained prior to the beginning of the course and included in the syllabus.

Discussion: For most students, distance learning opportunities will be new. Prior to agreeing to participate in this environment, students must have adequate information about the course, procedures, and expectations to make an informed decision about the appropriateness of this modality in meeting their own learning goals.

18. Appropriate policies must be developed and disseminated concerning expectations for student attendance, time commitments, and other faculty expectations for performance.

19. Courses need to reflect sound pedagogy, and where appropriate, opportunities for student interaction and collaboration on specific course materials must be provided.

20. Support resources, such as books, videos, computer software, must be made available to students in a manner that is reasonable for those students who have enrolled in an on-line or distance class.

Discussion: If services are anticipated to be provided to students at a long distance from the main campus, then reasonable steps must be taken to provide those students with access to support materials at distance sites - or the students must be fully informed in advance that they will not have access and that there will be

portions of the learning opportunity that they will not be able to participate in.

FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS:

21. Faculty instructing distance education courses should be of equivalent experience and eligible for academic rank in the same manner as their on-site counterparts.

Discussion: Faculty involved in distance learning opportunities need to be fully involved in all aspects of the academic program, just as they would be if they were involved in more traditional offerings. While some distinctions in qualifications may be appropriate in terms of knowledge of technology or other specialty areas, the breadth and degree of training and experience should be as extensive as any other faculty member.

22. Faculty must be fully trained in all aspects of the technology that is used to deliver the course, and continuous ongoing support must be provided by the educational institution.

Discussion: The faculty member delivering instruction needs to have the requisite skills necessary to successfully implement the effective use of whatever teaching tools are used in the delivery of material. However, faculty outside of computer oriented disciplines cannot be expected to stay current in the rapidly evolving field of computers and related technology. Therefore, institutions that use advanced technology as a delivery tool must be prepared to provide the support necessary to ensure that these tools are used appropriately. This must include support in the design, delivery, student access, and updating of on-line or computer based materials.

23. In those cases where appropriate, qualified mentors or discussion leaders are required, the same standards must exist for determining quality and ability of these support personnel as would be used in a traditional setting.

24. Faculty assignment to distance education courses must reflect the actual faculty involvement, including adequate time and resources for faculty training, course preparation, and technology adaptation.

Discussion: Faculty who undertake to teach classes at a distance are substantially increasing their responsibilities in ways that many institutions are unprepared to understand and acknowledge. Institutions are responsible to monitor faculty behavior and involvement, to assist faculty in transitioning to new modalities of teaching, and to adequately compensate faculty for the additional time necessary to succeed in this new arena.

INSTRUCTOR/COURSE EVALUATION:

25. Course/instructor evaluations for distance classes must be implemented to be commensurate with procedures used for evaluation of classes taught through traditional methods. Students participating in distance classes must be given the opportunity to provide course/instructor evaluations anonymously (e.g., by returning evaluations via the U.S. Postal Service).

TECHNOLOGICAL STANDARDS:

26. Technological problems will occur that will require appropriate back-up and/or face-to-face technologies.

Discussion: These back-up technologies should be designed to maintain the integrity of the course in a manner that provides as little disruption to student learning as possible. If student learning is disrupted or a student cannot complete a course due to technological issues that are the responsibility of the educational institution, then the institution is responsible for providing the student with alternative means that will meet their specific needs in relation to the original learning contract.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES:

27. Procedures to address grievances of the student must be implemented.

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