

## **Executive summary**

This document explains the definitions of distance education used by regulatory agencies and the University of Missouri (UM) System administration to:

- track distance education courses, programs, and students and
- ensure UM's compliance with federal regulations, accreditation standards, and university policies.

Moreover, this document provides the relationships between distance education definitions and the coding used with the UM System's information systems for students and courses at each university within the UM System.

# 1. Definitions

This section explains the definitions of distance education used by UM System administration to track distance education courses, programs, and students and to ensure UM's compliance with federal regulations, accreditation standards, and university policies. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the definitions used by regulatory agencies and accrediting bodies.

The UM System follows the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)'s definitions of distance education; the HLC is the accrediting body that accredits each university within the UM System (refer to Appendix 1 for more details).

## 1.1. Distance Education

The term “**distance education**” is defined as education that uses one or more technologies to (1) deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and (2) support regular and substantive interaction<sup>1</sup>

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- **Distance education program:** The UM System defines distance education programs as programs that meet all the following 3 conditions:
  - That 50% or more of the program is offered by distance education AND
  - That have notified the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (MO DHEWD) that they intend to be offered in the online modality<sup>2</sup> AND
  - That have approval from their universities.<sup>3</sup>
- **Online course:** The UM System defines an online course as a distance education course in which the instruction and interaction is delivered specifically via the Internet, as opposed to close-circuit television, open broadcasts, etc., for the distance-delivered portions. To determine what percentage of a course is online, divide the number of classroom (in-person) contact hours replaced by instruction designed and delivered online by the total number of contact hours required for the course.
- **Online program:** The UM System defines an online program as a distance education program that is delivered specifically via the Internet for the distance-delivered portions.
- **Online student:** The UM System defines an online student as a student whose primary program is offered online or at a distance. The student is admitted to an online program, may take any type of course, but overall must maintain 51% or more credit hours in online/distance mediated courses. A student will not be changed semester to semester, but will be monitored and need to adjust their course load if they fall below the 51% or more over two major semesters. A student admitted to both a campus and a distance program will have the designation of the program with the highest academic level. The academic level hierarchy is defined as doctorate, educational specialist, master's, graduate certificate, graduate post-baccalaureate, undergraduate degree, undergraduate certificate, undergraduate non-divisional. For example, a student in a campus master's program and online graduate certificate program would be a campus student since master's supersedes a graduate certificate. If a student is admitted to two programs of the same level, one campus and one online, the student will have the designation of campus student. Please note, this is different from an online course-taker.
- **Online course-taker:** The UM System defines an online course-taker is a student who is enrolled in an online course.

## 1.2. Correspondence education

The term “**correspondence education**” is used to describe 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. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is

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<sup>2</sup> For accreditation purposes, all programs in which 50 percent or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered courses are reported as distance programs to the HLC to meet their requirements. However, unless the program has received approval from MO DHEWD, they are not counted as distance education programs by the UM System for our internal operations.

<sup>3</sup> Individual universities may have additional requirements beyond these for a program to be considered an online program for operational purposes, such as inclusion in System-wide marketing efforts, on the Missouri Online website, etc.



## 2. Compliance Issues

### 2.1. Federal Title IV Regulations

In order to be eligible for Federal Student Aid (FSA), the UM System must comply with federal Title IV regulations (see Appendix 1).

#### 2.1.1. Distance Education Program FSA Eligibility

A distance education program at a domestic school is considered an eligible FSA program if it has been accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for accreditation of distance education. The HLC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for accreditation of distance education.

### 2.2. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enrollment certification rules require that enrollment be broken out by in-residence versus distance education courses. Certifying officials must know which courses will meet the VA definition of in-residence courses – all others are classified as distance education courses for VA purposes. See Appendix 1 for the definitions.

**The distinction between “in-residence” and “distance” training can determine how much housing allowance a student is entitled to receive.** Therefore, definitions of instructional modality in the schedule of courses or other data sources must be consistent and reliable to assure compliance with VA definitions when reporting enrollment data.

### 2.3. U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security regulations require institutions to ensure that an international student is primarily studying at a physical location on campus for the preponderance of their education (i.e., at least nine credits per semester for an undergraduate must be onsite).

#### 2.3.1. Implications

- The UM System should not issue SEVIS I-20's to international students for F-1 visa purposes for degree programs in which a student cannot complete the program physically onsite/on-campus.
- International Services needs clear identification of course (class) attributes to determine if a specific course section should be considered as distance education for immigration compliance purposes.
- Similarly, the international admission offices need to know if an academic program and/or academic plan are sufficiently onsite/on-campus to be a visa-eligible option for the student.

## **APPENDIX 1. DEFINITIONS**

### **1. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)**

IPEDS is the data system required by the United States Congress for use by the United States Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics.

#### **1.1. Distance Education**

The term “distance education” is defined by IPEDS as education that uses one or more technologies to (1) deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and (2) support regular and substantive interaction<sup>4</sup> between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used for instruction may include the folv188 (ne)18.5 ded11.9y

the Internet,

made this identification and whether the HLC has reviewed the identification and that there may be Title IV consequences for institutions that have not adequately made this identification.

#### **4.1. Distance Education**

The term “distance education” is defined by the HLC in the same way it is defined by IPEDS (see above).

- **Distance-delivered course:** The HLC defines a distance-delivered course as a course in which at least 75 percent 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:** The HLC defines a distance-



- If the program has a combination of distance and correspondence education courses that together add up to 50% or more, then list the program in the category that represents the largest percentage.

New HLC definitions also require the reporting of in-



