



Recommendations Regarding COVID-19

On March 5, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education/Student Financial Aid issued a memorandum on the subject of “Guidance for interruptions of study related to Coronavirus (COVID-19),” revised on March 20, 2020. As stated in the revised memorandum, the Department has permitted the recognized accrediting organizations to waive distance education (DE) review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of the COVID-19 virus. This waiver is for students who were or who will be in attendance at the institution on or before June 1, 2020. (If you wish to seek approval for distance education delivery on a permanent basis, the standard COE approval process will be required.) One other thing to note: as mentioned in the ED memorandum, the waiver of accreditation requirements to allow immediate student access to distance education options is not available for clock-hour programs that lead to licensure if the licensure body will not accept distance education courses or hours or give credit for them toward the number of hours a student must complete. Please check with your state board(s) to determine if distance education is a viable option for your students preparing to sit for state licensure exams.

COE defines “distance education” as an education delivery method that uses one or more technologies to provide instruction to students who are separated from the instructor, and that supports regular and substantive instruction between students and the instructor. The Council has developed an abbreviated Institutional Distance Education application for the temporary approval of this delivery format (available from alex.wittig@council.org or from www.council.org). If you have found a DE platform (including such social media options as Google Meet, Skype, YouTube or Zoom) with content appropriate to your programs of study, please complete the short application and return it to Ms. Marcia Cox (marcia.cox@council.org). Ms. Cox will conduct a review of the application, including an online review of the program content, if available, at her soonest convenience. Upon her approval, the Council will notify your institution of the Commission’s approval to begin offering temporary online instruction to your current students. As indicated in the Department’s memo, the Council will waive the requirement to present the application for review before the full Commission prior to Council approval. We will also waive the application fee since this is a temporary approval only. Your challenge, of course, will be to find an appropriate learning platform and distance education curriculum that meets the learning objectives of your occupational programs. This approval has no explicit expiration date; however, it is the intention of the Department of Education and the Council that temporary distance education will be required by institutions only during the closure of their campus facilities.

To minimize possible exposure to the COVID-19 virus, some COE institutions have implemented a procedure for the email or online delivery of assignments from instructors to students, or for the electronic transmission of completed homework from students to instructors. In addition, some institutions have opened online “chat rooms” or discussion boards where students may communicate at a distance with faculty or other students about selected topics. These options are not considered by the Council to be “distance education” when there is no delivery of substantive course instruction (i.e., lecture or demonstration). Consequently, these computer-based file-sharing and chat room options do not require COE approval. Note, however, that if the instructor is introducing students to new concepts, competencies or skills required in the course, this would be “distance education” and COE approval is required. If you are still in doubt as to whether your proposal meets the Council’s definition of distance education, please contact Dr. Alex Wittig at alex.wittig@council.org.

Please be sure to notify the Council of any disruption in instruction at your institution. Your notification should include the campuses effected by the closure and the date instruction temporarily ceased. Finally, please notify the Council when the campus re-opens and classes resume.

The Council appreciates the precautions you are taking to safeguard the health and safety of your students, faculty and staff. Please contact Dr. Wittig if we can be of further assistance to you as you explore options to continue your instructional programs during an interruption of class attendance.

30 March 2020