Principles of Good Practice for Distance Education

Definition

[Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 2, Subchapter J, Section 2.202](#), defines distance education as the formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50%) of instruction. Distance education includes hybrid and 100% online courses and programs as defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Distance education at l public institutions of higher education in Texas is designed to provide students across the state with access to courses and programs that meet their needs.

The Principles of Good Practice for Academic Degree and Certificate Programs and Credit Courses Offered at a Distance (PGP) apply to course types in distance learning as described in [TAC, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 2, Subchapter J, Section 2.202](#). Institutions of higher education should make a reasonable effort to provide an accurate description of hybrid and 100% online courses or programs to students, including the amount of face-to-face or synchronous meetings and in-person proctored exams.

Complying with the PGP guidelines does not guarantee compliance with federal requirements, regulatory authority, or quality assurance standards. This document was derived from a collective review of the original PGP guidelines, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) standards, Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) guidelines, Quality Matters (QM) rubrics, Online Learning Consortium Quality Scorecard (SC), and Online SUNY Course Quality Review (OSCQR). Each item has a list of standards or regulation documents mapped to it at the end of the statement. The item that is bolded is the originating document. For example, the following entry means the statement came from C-RAC originally, but is also referenced in OSCQR, SACSCOC, and SC:

> The institution provides web-based information to students about the nature of the distance learning environment and the skills needed for learning at a distance. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, SACSCOC, SC)

Terms

Distance Education

Used throughout this document to align with the TAC definition of distance education and to encompass terms such as distance learning, online courses/programs, and course/programs offered electronically used in previous versions of the PGP.

Online Learning

Any component of instruction in a course or program that occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations.

Basic Assumptions

There are six basic assumptions central to the Principles of Good Practice for Academic Degree and Certificate Programs and Credit Courses Offered at a Distance:

- The course or program offered at a distance is provided by or through an institution that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and authorized to operate in the state where the course or program originates.

- The institution's programs and courses holding specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when offered at a distance.

- The "institution" may be a single institution or a consortium of such institutions.

- These principles are generally applicable to degree or certificate programs and to courses offered at a distance.

- It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs and courses it provides at a distance and certify continued compliance with these principles.

- Institutions offering programs or credit courses are responsible for satisfying all in-state approval and accreditation requirements before students are enrolled.

Institutional Context and Commitment

There are 33 principles related to institutional context and commitment, which are separated into the subheadings Role and Mission, Planning, Students and Student Services, Library and Learning Resources, Faculty Support, and Resources for Learning:

Role and Mission

1. If an institution offers a significant portion of its courses and programs at a distance, it should be clearly reflected in the institution's mission. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

2. The mission statement explains the role of distance education within the range of the institution's programs and services. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

3. Institutional and program statements of vision and values inform how the distance education environment is created and supported. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

4. As appropriate, the institution incorporates into its distance education programs methods of meeting the stated institutional goals for the student experience at the institution. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

5. The recruitment and admissions programs supporting the distance education courses and programs appropriately target the student populations to be served. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

6. The students enrolled in the institution's distance education courses and programs fit the admissions requirements for the students the institution intends to serve. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

7. Senior administrators and staff can articulate how distance education is consistent with the institution's mission and goals. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

Planning

8. The institution prepares a multiyear budget for distance education that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, and technology infrastructure. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

9. The institution provides evidence of a multiyear technology plan that addresses its goals for distance education and includes provision for a robust and scalable technical infrastructure. (**C-RAC**, SC)

10. Development and ownership of plans for distance education extend beyond the administrators directly responsible for it and the programs directly using it. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

11. Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase the number of programs provided through distance education courses and programs and/or the number of students to be enrolled in them. (**C-RAC**)

12. Plans for distance education are linked effectively to budget and technology planning to ensure adequate support for current and future offerings. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

13. Plans for expanding distance education demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality. (**C-RAC**)

14. The institution and its distance education programs have a track record of conducting needs analyses and of supporting programs. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

Students and Student Services

15. Advertising, recruiting, and admissions materials clearly and accurately represent the distance education courses or programs and the services available. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

16. The institution has admission/acceptance criteria in place to assess the extent to which a student has the background, knowledge, and technical skills required to undertake a distance education course or program. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

17. Course/program announcements and electronic catalog entries provide appropriate and accurate information for distance education courses, such as program goals, academic requirements, academic calendar, and faculty. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

18. Students are provided with clear, complete, and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree program requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, assumptions about technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services and financial aid resources, and costs and payment policies. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

19. The institution provides web-based information to students about the nature of distance learning and the skills needed for learning at a distance. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, SACSCOC, SC)

20. Students enrolled in distance education courses are able to use the technology employed, have the equipment necessary to succeed, and are provided assistance in the technical environment. (C-RAC, OSCQR, QM, **SACSCOC**, SC)

    a. The institution provides a distance learning orientation program and students using distance learning demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, OSCQR, SC)

    b. Students in distance education programs have ready access to technology support, preferably 24/7 support. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, SACSCOC, SC)

    c. Students using distance education demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources. (**C-RAC**, QM, SACSCOC)

21. Students have adequate access to the range of services appropriate to support the programs offered through distance education. (C-RAC, OSCQR, QM, **SACSCOC**, SC)

    a. Students in distance learning programs have adequate access to academic and non-academic student services appropriate to the delivery of the distance learning program, including financial aid, course registration, and career and placement counseling. (**C-RAC**, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

    b. The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the distance education program. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, SACSCOC, SC)

22. Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and student rights appropriate to support their learning. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

    a. Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

    b. Students in distance education programs have an adequate procedure for resolving their complaints, and the institution follows its policies and procedures. (C-RAC, OSCQR, **SACSCOC**, SC)

23. Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution's system of student authentication. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

24. Documented procedures assure that security of personal information is protected in the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

25. Students are provided access to academic resources such as tutoring, as well as administrative/business offices and services, in a manner that increases operational efficiencies for students not physically on campus. (C-RAC, OSCQR, **SACSCOC**, SC)

Library and Learning Resources

26. Students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library and learning resources. (C-RAC, QM, **SACSCOC**, SC)

27. Students using distance education have adequate access to learning resources, including libraries, information resources, laboratories, and equipment appropriate to academic courses or programs. (**C-RAC**, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

Faculty Support

28. The course or program provides faculty support services and training specifically related to teaching via distance education modalities. (**C-RAC,** SACSCOC, SC)

29. The institution provides adequate equipment, software, and communications access to faculty to support interaction with students, institutions, and other faculty. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

30. Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate recognition of teaching and scholarly activities related to courses of programs offered via distance education. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

Resources for Learning

31. The institution ensures that appropriate learning resources are available to students. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

32. The institution evaluates the adequacy of and the cost to students for access to learning resources. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

33. The institution explores and encourages adoption of Open Educational Resources (OERs) when appropriate and available. (**OSCQR**, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

Curriculum and Instruction

There are 24 principles related to curriculum and instruction:

1. A degree or certificate course or program offered via distance education is coherent and complete. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

   a. The institution assures that each program of study results in collegiate-level learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded by the institution. **(SACSCOC)**

   b. The institution assures that the degree or certificate program offered via distance education is coherent and complete. **(SACSCOC)**

   c. The institution assures that distance education programs leading to undergraduate degrees include general education requirements. **(SACSCOC)**

2. The course or program provides for regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students, students and students, and students and content. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

   a. Regular and substantive instructor-to-student expectations and predictable/scheduled interactions and feedback are present, appropriate for the course length and structure, and are easy to find. (OSCQR, **SACSCOC**, SC)

b. Expectations for all course interactions (instructor to student, student to student, student to instructor) are clearly stated and modeled in all course interactions/communication channels. (OSCQR, **SACSCOC**, SC)

3. Academic standards and student learning for all courses or programs offered via distance education will be the same as those for courses or programs delivered by other means at the institution where the course or program originates. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

4. Faculty and other academically qualified persons participate fully in the decisions concerning program curricula and program oversight. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

5. The faculty assumes primary responsibility for ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

6. The technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the courses and programs, and expectations concerning the use of such technology are clearly communicated to students. (C-RAC, OSCQR, QM, **SACSCOC**, SC)

7. Distance education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

8. Academic support services are appropriate and specifically available for distance education. (C-RAC, OSCQR, QM, **SACSCOC**, SC)

9. Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs, including those offered through distance education. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

10. For all degree programs offered through distance education, the programs embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with the institution's mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

11. For all courses offered through distance education, the institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded and justifies the use of a unit other than semester credit hours by explaining its equivalency. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

12. An institution entering into consortial arrangements or contractual agreements for the delivery of courses/programs or services offered by distance education is an active participant in ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the courses/programs offered by all of the participants. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

13. The institution's policies on academic integrity include explicit references to online learning and are discussed during the orientation for distance education students. (**C-RAC**, OSCQR, QM)

14. Approval of distance education courses and programs follows standard processes used in the college or university. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

15. Distance education courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis. (**C-RAC**, SC)

16. The curricular goals and course objectives show that the institution or program has knowledge of the best uses of online learning in different disciplines and settings. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

17. Curricula delivered through distance education are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs, if provided by the institution, or those provided by traditional institutions. (**C-RAC**)

18. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses and is effectively defined in easily available documents including course syllabi and program descriptions. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

19. Scheduling of distance education courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees. (**C-RAC**)

20. The institution or program has established and enforces a policy for distance education course enrollments to ensure faculty capacity to work appropriately with students. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

21. Expectations for any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work) are stated clearly. (**C-RAC**)

22. Curriculum design and the course management system enable active faculty contribution to the learning environment. (**C-RAC**, QM, SC)

23. Course and program structures provide schedules and support known to be effective in helping distance education students persist and succeed. (**C-RAC**, QM, SACSCOC, SC)

24. Accessibility of course content and technologies required for course completion is reviewed and alternative methods for access are identified if necessary. (**SC**)

Faculty

There are nine principles related to faculty:

1. An institution offering distance or correspondence learning courses/programs ensures that there are enough faculty qualified to develop, design, and teach the courses/programs. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

2. The institution has clear criteria for the evaluation of faculty teaching distance education courses and programs, and the criteria are shared with faculty on the commencement of their online assignments. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

3. Faculty who teach in distance education courses and programs receive appropriate training and are provided with resources and tools that support their online teaching practice. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

4. Online learning faculty are carefully selected, appropriately trained, frequently evaluated, and are marked by an acceptable level of turnover. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

5. For faculty teaching online, the institution has a training program(s) and ongoing professional development that incorporates online learning pedagogy, federal and state requirements for distance and correspondence education, and ensures competency with the range of software products used by the institution. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

6. Faculty are proficient and effectively supported in using the course management system. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

7. The office or persons responsible for distance education training programs are clearly identified and have the competencies to accomplish their tasks, including knowledge of the specialized resources and technical support available to support course development and delivery. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

8. Faculty members teaching distance education share in the mission and goals of the institution and its programs and are provided the opportunities to contribute to the broader activities of the institution. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

9. Students routinely provide feedback on the distance education courses/programs and express satisfaction with the quality of the instruction provided by online learning faculty. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

Evaluation and Assessment

There are seven principles related to evaluation and assessment:

1. Assessment of student learning follows processes used in onsite courses or programs and/or reflects good practice in assessment methods. (**C-RAC**, QM, SACSCOC)

2. Student course evaluations are routinely taken, and an analysis of them contributes to strategies for course improvements. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

3. The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in distance education courses and uses the results for improvement. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC, SC)

4. The institution documents its successes in implementing changes informed by its programs of assessment and evaluation. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

5. The institution sets appropriate goals for the retention/persistence of students using distance education, assesses its achievement of these goals, and uses the results for improvement. (**C-RAC**, SACSCOC)

6. If faculty roles are distributed, evaluation strategies ensure effective communication between faculty members who design curriculum, faculty members who interact with students, and faculty members who evaluate student learning. (**C-RAC,** SACSCOC)

7. The institution uses examples of student work and student interactions among themselves and with faculty in assessing program learning outcomes. (**C-RAC,** SACSCOC)

Facilities and Finances

There are two principles related to facilities and finances:

1. Appropriate equipment and technical expertise required for distance education are available. (C-RAC, OSCQR, **SACSCOC**, SC)

2. The institution, in making distance and correspondence education courses/programs a part of its mission, provides adequate funding for the scope for the planned program and for faculty, staff, services, and technological infrastructure to support the methodology. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

Adherence to Federal Requirements

There are six principles related to adherence to federal requirements:

1. The institution demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (1) a secure login and pass code, (2) proctored examinations, and (3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

2. The institution has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**, SC)

3. The institution has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

4. The institution that offers distance education must ensure that it reports accurate headcount enrollment where required. (C-RAC, **SACSCOC**)

5. The institution demonstrates that efforts are made to ensure compliance with federal and state accessibility requirements. (**SACSCOC**, SC)

6. The institution demonstrates that efforts are made to ensure compliance with federal student financial aid requirements. ([National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators](), SACSCOC, SC)

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