

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM: 5.J

DATE: June 28, 2012

SUBJECT: Approval and Reporting of Online Programs

Recent revisions to the definitions used by the Higher Learning Commission are having significant impacts on campus reporting, especially in the arena of distance/online education. This Commission states that if more than 50% of the courses required for any program can be completed online, the institution should be reporting the program as an online program. This is stated in the attached materials copied from the HLC website.

Using this definition, almost every program offered within the system should be identified and reported as an online program. However, some campuses have read this to require such reporting only if 50% or more of the courses required for the major are available online. At this time, Board staff is not aware of any attempts to get a reading about this from HLC staff. Regardless, this contradicts system policies which state that Board authorization is required before a program can be delivered online. This becomes even more convoluted since these authorizations/approvals also tie to information provided to the USDOE that drives financial aid eligibility.

Members of the Council should be prepared to raise issues and to suggest plans to align system policies with Commission practices.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discussion.

The following material is abstracted from the HLC's website's FAQ's for completing the annual report. (See the "Distance Education" section of <http://ncahlc.org/Annual-Institutional-Data-Update/aidu-faq.html>)

If the possibility exists for even one student to complete 50% of the degree or Title IV eligible certificate online, should we list it in the Distance Education and Correspondence section?

As the number of online courses we offer increases, it may be possible for a given student to take 50% or more of the course work online. If the possibility exists for even one student to complete 50% of the degree or Title IV eligible certificate online, I assume we should be listing it in the Distance Education and Correspondence section. Is that correct?

Report any programs that can be completed 50% or more through distance education or correspondence education, regardless of whether students are enrolled.

The Institutional Update indicates that we are to report programs "where 50% or more of the courses or credits in the program are offered through distance education." How is that calculation to be made?

The Commission defines a distance education course as one in which 75% or more of the instruction is offered by distance education. The Commission defines a correspondence education course as one in which 75% or more of the instruction is offered by correspondence education. Do not use other definitions. To determine whether a program is offered via distance education, take the number of distance education courses or correspondence education courses in the educational program divided by the total number of courses in that particular program. This should yield the percentage of distance or correspondence education offered in that program. If the result is that 50% or more of the program is offered by distance education, you should list the program as such. If the result is that 50% or more of the program is offered by correspondence education, you should list the program as such. 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.