

## CHAPTER 2



### Distance Education

#### **DISTANCE EDUCATION & CORRESPONDENCE STUDY**

Schools use distance education and correspondence courses to respond to students' needs for alternatives to the schedules and locations at which courses traditionally have been offered. A school may not refuse to provide FSA funds to a student because he or she is enrolled in correspondence or distance education courses unless the courses are not part of an eligible program.

Some participating institutions contract with distance education providers that are not eligible to participate in the FSA programs. These participating institutions must ensure that they do not exceed the limitations on contractual arrangements (see previous section).

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#### ***Distance Education***

Distance education programs at domestic schools are considered eligible FSA programs if they have been accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Department for accreditation of distance education. They are not subject to the rules that apply to correspondence coursework, which are discussed in the next section.

Distance education means education that uses certain technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor, and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor. The interaction may be synchronous (student and instructor are in communication at the same time) or asynchronous. The technologies may include

- the internet,
- audio conferencing, or
- one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices.

A course taught through video cassettes or discs is also considered a distance education course, but only if one of the three technologies listed above is used to support interaction between the students and the instructor.

#### ***Correspondence courses***

Unlike distance education courses, which are now treated in the same way as all other eligible programs, some restrictions apply to correspondence courses.

A correspondence course is a home-study course provided by a school under which the school provides instructional materials, including examinations on the materials, to students who are not physically attending classes at the school. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. When a student completes a portion of the instructional materials, the student takes the examinations that relate to that portion of the materials and returns the examinations to the school for grading.

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### **Changes to distance education & telecommunications**

Pursuant to the HERA 2005, telecommunications courses are no longer considered correspondence courses, thus the 50% limits on correspondence courses and students no longer apply.

The definition of "correspondence course" was revised and a new definition of "telecommunications course" was added to 34 CFR 600.2.

*Federal Register*, August 9, 2006.

Pursuant to HEOA 2008, the definition of "telecommunications" was removed from 34 CFR 600.2 and the statutory definition of "distance education" was added.

*Federal Register*, October 27, 2009.

### **Accreditation for distance education**

The Department reminded schools in September 2006 that distance education programs must be evaluated by an accrediting agency that is recognized by ED for the purpose of evaluating distance education. This letter included specific instructions on notifying ED if the school intended to seek new accreditation, and updating the E-App to reflect changes to the school's accreditation.

GEN-06-17

### **Telecommunications & correspondence study at foreign schools**

A program offered by a foreign school in whole or in part by telecommunications, by correspondence, or as a direct assessment program is not an eligible program.

34 CFR 600.51(d)

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### Distance Education

#### **Correspondence courses & institutional eligibility**

34 CFR 600.2, "Correspondence course"

34 CFR 600.7(a)(1)(i) and (ii)

34 CFR 602.3, "Correspondence education" HEA Sec. 102(a)(3)(A) and (B) **Volume 2—School Eligibility and Operations, 2010-2011 2–26** *FSA HB Apr 2011* • If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the course is considered to be a correspondence course.

- If a school adds telecommunications technology, such as electronic delivery of course materials or an online discussion board, to a correspondence course, the school must ascertain the predominant method of instruction (correspondence or telecommunications), keeping in mind that a telecommunications course must use technology to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. The school must apply the rules for the predominant method in administering its participation in the FSA programs.
- A course that is delivered in whole or in part through the use of video cassettes or video discs is a correspondence course unless the school also delivers comparable instruction to students attending resident classes at the school during the same award year.

If a school offers more than 50% of its courses by correspondence, the school loses its eligibility to participate in the FSA. Similarly, if 50% or more of a school's students are enrolled in its correspondence courses, the school loses its eligibility to participate in the FSA programs (see *Chapter 1*).

Note that correspondence students enrolled in certificate programs are not eligible for FSA funds. For a full discussion of when a school may pay a student for correspondence study, see *Volume 1, Chapter 1*. Also see *Volume 3, Chapter 2* for limitations on the cost of attendance for correspondence students and *Volume 3, Chapter 1* for the timing of disbursements to correspondence students.

#### **Videocassettes and discs example**

A school offers an English 101 course via video cassette and computer conferencing. English 101 is also offered to students physically attending classes at the school during the same award year. In this case this course would be considered a telecommunications course.

The school also offers Art History 302 via video cassette. Art History 302 is **not** offered to students physically attending classes at the school during this award year. In this case this course would **not** be considered a telecommunications course for this award year. It is considered a correspondence course.

#### **A combined correspondence and residential program example**

A school offers a truck driving program. The first part of the program is offered via correspondence. After completing the correspondence portion of the program the student has to attend a residential site where he or she actually learns how to drive trucks.

This program is considered a correspondence program. **Ch. 2—Program Eligibility 2–27** *FSA HB Apr 2011*

**As per the Federal Student Aid Handbook, Vol.2, Chapter 2, pages 2-24 to 2 – 26.**