

Distance Learning Education --Policy

The opportunity to earn a certificate or degree without stepping into a classroom has allured many to explore distance learning. In the past, distance learning technology limited instructor and student interaction. However, the enhancement of software such as Blackboard, WebCT, and AngelLearning has eliminated the technology barriers previously experienced and opened opportunities for group discussion in distance learning. As a result, post-secondary institutions are offering more distance learning courses. There are numerous advantages to distance learning. The two most notable reasons include scheduling convenience and elimination of transportation costs. In an effort to accommodate eligible participants for Trade Adjustment Assistance under the Trade Act of 1974 and/or the Workforce Innovative and Opportunity Act of 2014, who can benefit from distance learning, the following policy will apply when electing a distance learning program or training course provided by a post-secondary institution.

Definition

Distance learning will be defined for both TAA and WIOA programs as written in TEGL 9-05 where "under the TAA program, the Department has determined that distance learning may be considered "classroom training" when the degree or certificate received is equivalent to what would have been received if the training had been conducted on campus. [T]he final degree or certificate conferred must be equivalent in content and standard of achievement to the same program completed on campus or at an institutional training location."

Program/Course Eligibility

The procedures for determining a classroom training program as outlined in 20 CFR 617.22 apply when electing distance learning. Additionally, post-secondary institutions offering distance learning programs, degrees and certificates must hold a positive accreditation status with one of the national or regional accreditation agencies recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE).

The United States Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognize various accrediting entities throughout the United States. Institutions of higher learning voluntarily submit to the accreditation process. Accreditation standards are not universal and various factors affect the accrediting process.

Post-secondary institutions and programs accredited by a USDE recognized accrediting agency are eligible to receive federal funds. Post-secondary institutions with a positive accreditation status from one of the USDE recognized accrediting agencies as listed on the USDE website may be acceptable for individuals eligible for TAA and/or WIOA funding. A comprehensive list of recognized accrediting agencies may be found at the following website:

http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg6.html#NationallyRecognized

The following are the most identifiable accrediting agencies recognized by the USDE:

1. New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of higher Education (NEASC)

Accrediting institutions within: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East

2. New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Technical and Career Institutions

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3. North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA)
Accrediting institutions within: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Navajo nation, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming
4. Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSA)
Accrediting institutions within: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Central America, Europe, and the Middle East
5. Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS)
Accrediting institutions within: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Latin America
6. Western Association of Schools and Colleges Commission for Senior colleges and Universities(WASC)
Accrediting institutions within: California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Palau, Micronesia, Northern Marianas, Marshall Islands, and other Australasian locations
7. Western Association of Schools and Colleges Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
8. Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWCCU)
Accrediting institutions within: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington
9. Distance Education and Training Council Accrediting Commission (DETC)
Specializing in distance learning education

Upon accreditation verification, the WIOA career advisor will complete the DOL-2417 form and submit it to the state TAA and/or WIOA staff for final approval.

All approved post-secondary institutions must maintain a positive accreditation status with one of the approved accreditation agencies. In the event an institution loses accreditation distance learning programs and training courses will not be funded by TAA and/or WIOA or any other federal dollars through local Workforce Development agencies.

Monitoring

Participants in distance learning must sign a waiver that allows for the WIOA Career Advisors to request verification of enrollment in each participating course after the first completed week and at mid-term. In the case a participant does not submit to a waiver, the participant is required to obtain official documentation of attendance from the post-secondary institute's Office of the Registrar or Student Affairs Office which verifies attendance in each participating course after the first completed week and at mid-term. WIOA Career Advisors are required to maintain the original attendance documentation in a participant's file. Failure to provide enrollment or attendance documentation may result in the immediate termination of TAA and/or WIOA funding. Any additional documentation as required of participants in the TAA and/or WIOA program will be followed.

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Sources:

1. United States Department of Education website: www.usde.gov
2. Distance Education and Training website: www.detc.org
3. Council for Higher Education Accreditation website: www.chea.org
4. *Regional Accreditation for Online Schools: Make Sure Your School is Accredited by the Right Association* by Jamie Littlefield, with About.com website posted on 01/20/2009 at: <http://distancelearn.about.com/od/accreditationinfo/a/regional.htm>
5. Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 9-05;
6. Code of Federal Regulations Pertaining to ETA, Title 20 Chapter V Part 617 Subpart C 617.22: Approval of training