Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services

The institution offers high-quality instructional programs, student support services, and library and learning support services that facilitate and demonstrate the achievement of stated student learning outcomes. The institution provides an environment that supports learning, enhances student understanding and appreciation of diversity, and encourages personal and civic responsibility as well as intellectual, aesthetic, and personal development for all of its students.

A.   Instructional Programs

The institution offers high-quality instructional programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student outcomes leading to degrees, certificates, employment, or transfer to other higher education institutions or programs consistent with its mission. Instructional programs are systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all instructional activities offered in the name of the institution.

1. The institution demonstrates that all instructional programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, address and meet the mission of the institution and uphold its integrity.[1]

    - How does the institution ensure that its DE/CE program offerings fit the stated mission of the institution?

    - How does the institution ensure that its DE/CE programs and services are of high quality, comparable with the institution's face-to-face offerings, and appropriate to an institution of higher education?

    - How does the institution choose the fields of study in which it offers DE/CE programs? What stakeholders are consulted about the choices of study in which the institution offers DE/CE and how are they consulted?

    - What are the student achievement outcomes of the institution's DE/CE programs; i.e., to what extent do students progress through and complete degrees and certificates, gain employment, or transfer to four-year institutions through DE/CE programs only or through a mix of DE/CE and face-to-face delivery?

    - By what means are DE/CE programs assessed for currency, teaching and learning strategies, and student learning outcomes? Are the assessment methods different from those methods applied for assessment of face-to-face programs? What is the rationale?

        a. The institution identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with their educational preparation and the diversity, demographics, and economy of its communities. The institution relies upon research and analysis to identify student learning needs and to assess progress toward achieving stated learning outcomes.

- What research is conducted to inform the college what student learning needs are, including the academic and technical skills required, and if the needs can be effectively addressed through DE/CE?

- What means does the institution use to assess students' educational preparation for DE/CE programs? How is this information incorporated into program planning?

- Is there a policy that defines "regular and substantive interaction" for DE courses? (34 C.F.R. § 602.3.)

- What kind of research is being conducted to determine if students enrolled in DE/CE programs are achieving stated learning outcomes and if their level of achievement is comparable with students enrolled in face-to-face programs?

b. The institution utilizes delivery systems and modes of instruction compatible with the objectives of the curriculum and appropriate to the current and future needs of its students.[1]

- How does the institution determine that delivery of instruction in DE/CE mode fits the objectives and content of its courses and programs?

- How are activities offered in DE/CE mode evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting student needs?

- How effectively does DE/CE facilitate student learning? Is the level of effectiveness for facilitating student learning different from traditional delivery modes?

c. The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements.

- What student learning outcomes and assessments has the institution identified for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees offered in DE/CE mode? Are they different from outcomes/assessments in courses, programs, certificates, and degrees offered in traditional teaching mode? What is the rationale?

- How and by whom are student learning outcomes/assessments for programs offered in DE/CE mode and strategies for attaining them created? Do the strategies take into account how DE/CE programs compare with traditional programs in terms of student achievement?

- How and by whom are student learning outcomes and program outcomes for DE/CE assessed, and how are the assessment methods different from those used in the assessment of traditional programs? How are the results used for improvement, and who is involved in this dialog?

- If the institution uses course materials developed outside the institution for its programs offered in DE/CE format, how are these materials assessed, and how does the institution ensure that the academic standards are comparable with its other programs?

2. The institution assures the quality and improvement of all instructional courses and programs offered in the name of the institution, including collegiate, developmental, and pre-collegiate courses and programs, continuing and community education, study abroad, short-term training courses and programs, programs for international students, and contract or other special programs, regardless of type of credit awarded, delivery mode, or location.[1,2]

- By what criteria and processes does the institution decide to offer developmental, pre-collegiate, continuing and community education, short-term training, international student, or contract education programs in DE/CE mode?

- Which of these (or other) categories of courses and programs does the institution offer in DE/CE mode?

- What is the process for establishing and evaluating each type of course and program offered in DE/CE mode? How does the college determine the appropriate credit type of its courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode?

  a. The institution uses established procedures to design, identify learning outcomes for, approve, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses and programs. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for establishing quality and improving instructional courses and programs.

    - What established policies and institutional processes guide the development and evaluation of courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode? Are they different from the policies and institutional processes that guide the development and evaluation of courses offered in traditional mode? What is the rationale?

    - What is the role of faculty and how is discipline expertise or teaching knowledge and expertise in the field of DE/CE used for establishing quality of these courses?

    - What processes exist to approve and administer DE/CE courses and programs? Are the processes effective?

    - By what means and how often are DE/CE courses and programs evaluated? How is the evaluation different from that of traditional courses and programs? What is the rationale?

    - What improvements to DE/CE courses and programs have occurred as a result of evaluation?

  b. The institution relies on faculty expertise and the assistance of advisory committees when appropriate to identify competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution regularly assesses student progress towards achieving those outcomes.

    - How are competency levels and measurable student learning outcomes determined for DE/CE? Are they different from those selected for traditional programs? What is the rationale?

    - What is the role of faculty in this process? Has the institution established advisory committees with expertise in DE/CE, and if so what is their role?

- Do students have a clear path to achieving the student learning outcomes required of a course, program, degree, or certificate offered in DE/CE mode, and what information is provided to students in that regard? How well does the institution achieve and evaluate the effectiveness of learning at each level?

c. High-quality instruction and appropriate breadth, depth, rigor, sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning characterize all programs.

- How does the institution demonstrate the quality of its instruction for programs and courses in DE/CE mode? What evidence exists that DE/CE programs are characterized by the variables cited in this standard? How does the college use these qualities (breadth, depth, etc.) to determine that a DE/CE program is collegiate or pre-collegiate level?

- What institutional dialog has occurred to enhance understanding and agreement about the quality and level of its DE/CE programs? Who within the institution is involved in this dialog? How does staff with expertise and experience in teaching courses in DE/CE mode participate in this dialog?

d. The institution uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that reflect the diverse needs and learning styles of its students.[1]

- What assessment of student learning styles that relate to teaching in DE/CE mode has the college performed?

- How does the institution demonstrate that it is meeting the needs and learning styles of its students? How are faculty and staff informed and kept up-to-date about learning needs and pedagogical approaches related to DE/CE?

- Do courses in DE/CE mode include multiple ways of assessing student learning?

- What teaching methodologies are commonly used in DE/CE programs? How are methodologies selected? Do faculty discuss the relationship between the selected teaching methodologies and student performance?

- What efforts has the college made to match the teaching methodologies with particular needs of students and with learning styles? How effective are the instructional methodologies that the college uses in producing learning in DE/CE mode?

e. The institution evaluates all courses and programs through an on-going systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans.

- How does the college evaluate the effectiveness of its courses and programs offered in DE/CE mode? Is the process similar to courses and programs offered in traditional mode? What is the rationale?

- Are there policies that dictate satisfactory progress in DE/CE courses/programs?

- What types of data are available for DE/CE program evaluation? Does the evaluation include a curricular review?

- How is the relevancy of a program offered in DE/CE mode determined?

- How are results of evaluation of programs in DE/CE mode used in institutional planning? What changes/improvements in programs have occurred as a result of the consideration of program evaluations?

f. The institution engages in ongoing, systematic evaluation and integrated planning to assure currency and measure achievement of its stated student learning outcomes for courses, certificates, programs including general and vocational education, and degrees. The institution systematically strives to improve those outcomes and makes the results available to appropriate constituencies.

g. If an institution uses departmental course and/or program examinations, it validates their effectiveness in measuring student learning and minimizes test biases.

h. The institution awards credit based on student achievement of the course's stated learning outcomes. Units of credit awarded are consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms or equivalencies in higher education.

- What policies does the institution have for the award of academic credit for DE/CE programs? Are the policies similar to the traditional programs? What is the rationale for the decision? Are these policies regularly reviewed, including review of the extent to which they are suited for DE/CE?

i. The institution awards degrees and certificates based on student achievement of a program's stated learning outcomes.

3. The institution requires of all academic and vocational degree programs a component of general education based on a carefully considered philosophy that is clearly stated in its catalog. The institution, relying on the expertise of its faculty, determines the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education curriculum by examining the stated learning outcomes for the course.

    General education has comprehensive learning outcomes for the students who complete it, including the following:

    a. An understanding of the basic content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge: areas include the humanities and fine arts, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.

    b. A capability to be a productive individual and life-long learner: competency, computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis/logical thinking, and the ability to acquire knowledge through a variety of means.

- Are any of the institution's general education courses offered in DE/CE mode? What is the rationale for this decision and is it stated clearly in its catalog? How is it communicated to all stakeholders?

- What criteria does the college use to assure that the required skill level of students in DE/CE courses and programs meet collegiate standards and rigor?

- By what means does the institution ensure that the students develop the listed skills in DE/CE mode? How does the institution know that these means are effective?

- How well are students achieving these outcomes? What data exist about how well students are able to apply these skills to subsequent coursework, employment, or other endeavors?

c. A recognition of what it means to be an ethical human being and effective citizen: qualities include an appreciation of ethical principles; civility and interpersonal skills; respect for cultural diversity; historical and aesthetic sensitivity; and the willingness to assume civic, political, and social responsibilities locally, nationally, and globally.

4. All degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established interdisciplinary core.

5. Students completing vocational and occupational certificates and degrees demonstrate technical and professional competencies that meet employment and other applicable standards and are prepared for external licensure and certification.

6. The institution assures that students and prospective students receive clear and accurate information about educational courses and programs and transfer policies. The institution describes its degrees and certificates in terms of their purpose, content, course requirements, and expected student learning outcomes. In every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies learning outcomes consistent with those in the institution's officially approved course outline.

- How does the institution assure that information about its DE/CE courses and programs is clear and accurate? Are student learning outcomes included in descriptions of courses and programs?

- How do students enrolled in DE/CE programs receive information about the institution's degrees and certificates and in what format is the information available for reference? How does the institution verify that students receive a course syllabus that includes student learning outcomes, and that individual sections of courses adhere to the course objectives/learning outcomes?

a. The institution makes available to its students clearly stated transfer-of-credit policies in order to facilitate the mobility of students without penalty. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution certifies that the expected learning outcomes for transferred courses are comparable to the learning outcomes of its own courses. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements as appropriate to its mission.

- How does the institution develop, implement, and evaluate articulation agreements for DE/CE programs? What principles apply to the transfer of credit from other DE/CE programs where articulation arrangements do not exist?

- What principles apply for the approval of granting of credit for prior work experience in the institution's DE/CE programs?

b. When programs are eliminated or program requirements are significantly changed, the institution makes appropriate arrangements so that enrolled students may complete their education in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.[3]

c. The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently to prospective and current students, the public, and its personnel through its catalogs, statements, and publications, including those presented in electronic formats. It regularly reviews institutional policies, procedures, and publications to assure integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.[4]

- Through what means does the institution represent itself about its DE/CE programs? How are these means evaluated? Are they effective in reaching the potential students for DE/CE programs? How does the institution know that they are effective?

- Does the institution provide information to the public on student achievement in DE/CE programs? How does the institution ensure that information is current, accurate and aligned with the DE/CE provision?

7. In order to assure the academic integrity of the teaching-learning process, the institution uses and makes public governing board-adopted policies on academic freedom and responsibility, student academic honesty, and specific institutional beliefs or worldviews. These policies make clear the institution's commitment to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

a. Faculty distinguish between personal conviction and professionally accepted views in a discipline. They present data and information fairly and objectively.

- Does the institution have a policy on academic freedom? How is this policy implemented and monitored in DE/CE courses and programs?

b. The institution establishes and publishes clear expectations concerning student academic honesty and the consequences for dishonesty.

- Does the institution have a college-wide policy on academic honesty? Does the policy address issues on academic honesty, including verification of student identity, in relation to registration for, participation in, and completion of DE/CE?

- What mechanisms does the institution have for informing students and faculty about, and enforcing, its policies on academic honesty, including in DE/CE courses and programs? Does the policy appropriately ensure the protection of student privacy in the verification process?

- What mechanisms for verification of students enrolled in DE/CE programs does the institution have? Do these mechanisms include either a secure login and password and/or proctored exams and/or other effective technologies and practices for verifying student identity? Are the mechanisms regularly reviewed and how does the institution know that the mechanisms are effective in ensuring that the student who registers for a course is the same student who participates, completes, and receives credit for the course?

- How are policies and information about academic honesty and student verification made available to students, faculty, staff and the public? How does the college know that the promulgation of this information is effective?

- Does the institution have any prevention strategies in place to promote student verification? Are faculty members encouraged to promote student verification in the design of DE/CE courses? Is academic integrity including student verification covered in staff training and development? (For practices on student verification refer to WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies at: *http://wcet.wiche.edu/wcet/docs/cigs/studentauthentication/BestPractices.pdf*)

- To what extent is institutional data about incidents of academic dishonesty available and what types of data are available?

c. Institutions that require conformity to specific codes of conduct of staff, faculty, administrators, or students, or that seek to instill specific beliefs or worldviews, give clear prior notice of such policies, including statements in the catalog and/or appropriate faculty or student handbooks.

8. Institutions offering curricula in foreign locations to students other than U.S. nationals operate in conformity with standards and applicable Commission policies.[2]

- Does the institution promote its distance education in foreign locations? How does the promotion of these activities overseas align with the institution's mission and the objectives for its DE?

- Does the institution enroll students who do not reside in the U.S. into programs? How does it ensure that the foreign students appropriately comply with the admission requirements for the programs? Are all students admitted to the programs recognized as U.S. students?