

2.0 Instructional Program

2.12 Distance Education or Executive Degree Programs. If the program offers degree programs using formats or methods other than students attending regular on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, these degree programs must a) be consistent with the mission of the program and within the program's established areas of expertise; b) be guided by clearly articulated student learning outcomes that are rigorously evaluated; c) be subject to the same quality control processes that other degree programs in the university are; and d) provide planned and evaluated learning experiences that take into consideration and are responsive to the characteristics and needs of adult learners. If the program offers distance education or executive degree programs, it must provide needed support for these programs, including administrative, travel, communication and student services. The program must have an ongoing program to evaluate the academic effectiveness of the format, to assess learning methods and to systematically use this information to stimulate program improvements. The program must have processes in place through which it establishes that the student who registers in a distance education course or degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives the academic credit.

***Interpretation.** A program of study may be delivered through various models and may use a wide range of learning technologies. Distance education or executive degree programs are those that are offered in a format or design that differs significantly from the established approach of students attending regular on-site course sessions spread over a semester, quarter or other standard term. The occasional use of sophisticated communications technologies in a regular program format need not be included in this section.*

A degree program offered in a distance or executive format is a curriculum or course of study that is flexibly structured to meet the needs of a student population and that leads to the award of a degree. There is great variation in these models but generally they are designed to accommodate the needs of employed professionals (or part-time students) who cannot pursue a course of study in a standard, in-residence time frame or format. Most often, accommodations are introduced in terms of time, location or method of delivery. Executive or extended degree programs, for example, may be offered in concentrated blocks of time during the summer or throughout the academic year. They may be offered in locations distant from the main campus of the institution that awards the degree. Distance education may be offered in innovative formats, taking advantage of advanced technology such as interactive television, computer-assisted learning and other contemporary learning methods.

Innovative means of offering public health degree programs and thereby upgrading the qualifications of the public health workforce are encouraged, particularly those models that respond to the needs of mid-career working public health professionals. Programs that do so, however, must plan, implement and evaluate these degree programs, consistent with principles of good practice regarding adult learning. While format and structure of the learning experiences must be appropriate to the adult student, academic rigor must be comparable regardless of the format and structure. Academic rigor takes into consideration such factors as the qualifications of the instructor, institutional approval and review processes, and congruence between degree of complexity and the level of the degree.

While CEPH supports innovative delivery modes, including distance learning modalities, institutions that pursue them must demonstrate adequate faculty support, regular and substantive faculty/student interaction, adequate student/student interaction, successful integration of supervised and evaluated practice experiences, continuity of support to sustain the degree programs and a commitment to evaluate the learning model. Evaluation of student outcomes and of the learning model are especially important in institutions that offer distance learning but do not offer a comparable in-residence program.

Additionally, the program must verify the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as a secure login and pass code; proctored examinations; and new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity. The program must notify students in writing that it uses processes that protect student privacy and must

notify students of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.

Required Documentation. The self-study document should include the following:

- a. Identification of all degree programs that are offered in a format other than regular, on-site course sessions spread over a standard term, including those offered in full or in part through distance education in which the instructor and student are separated in time or place or both. The instructional matrix in Criterion 2.1.a may be referenced for this purpose.
- b. Description of the distance education or executive degree programs, including an explanation of the model or methods used, the program's rationale for offering these programs, the manner in which it provides necessary administrative and student support services, the manner in which it monitors the academic rigor of the programs and their equivalence (or comparability) to other degree programs offered by the program, and the manner in which it evaluates the educational outcomes, as well as the format and methods.
- c. Description of the processes that the program uses to verify that the student who registers in a distance education course or degree is the same student who participates in and completes the course or degree and receives the academic credit.
- d. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the program's strengths, weaknesses and plans relating to this criterion.