

Occupational Therapist Assistant & Physiotherapist Assistant Education Accreditation Program

GUIDE-08 - PRINCIPLES IN THE ACCREDITATION OF PROGRAMS OFFERING DISTRIBUTED EDUCATION / DISTANCE LEARNING

PREAMBLE

All education programs, including those with distributed education sites, and those who offer some coursework through distance learning, must demonstrate compliance with the OTA & PTA EAP Accreditation Standards to be granted accreditation status.

DEFINITIONS

Distributed Education is a broad concept that includes both education delivered wholly off-campus and elements of traditional education made available remotely. The distributed education model can be used in combination with traditional classroom-based courses, with traditional distance learning experiences, or it can be used to create wholly virtual classrooms.

Distance learning is a subset of distributed education. In occupational therapist assistant and physiotherapist assistant education programs distance learning is defined as a structured educational process in which students and instructors are separated by geographic distance or time, and which is supported by communications technology such as telephone, email, online delivery or synchronous videoconferencing.

Examples of options for distributed education include:

- a) establishment of satellite/extension education programs;
- b) distance learning programs where:
 - i print-based or online instructional modules supplement or replace in-person instruction in a course or multiple courses;
 - ii videoconferencing or teleconferencing for instruction where students are located at dispersed clinical sites or a branch campus;
 - iii print-based or online instruction to replace other instructional methods for individual students who are dispersed regionally, nationally, or internationally, as part of a “virtual” education program.

ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

All accredited programs must demonstrate compliance with the OTA & PTA EAP Accreditation Standards, including programs offered partially or fully by distributed education/distance learning. The following requirements/guidelines should be considered by education programs when preparing the Self Study Report, by Peer Review Team members when reviewing the

program, and by the Joint Accreditation Committee when making an accreditation decision recommendation or reviewing a Substantive Change Request:

1. The institution:
 - supports philosophically, and through the provision of adequate financial and human resources, the development of distributed education programs and distance learning, and related academic and administrative requirements
 - evaluates the educational effectiveness of distributed education programs, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention rates, and student satisfaction to ensure comparability to campus-based traditional programs
2. Students who are recipients of distributed education/distance learning programs
 - benefit from course design, and forms of communication, technology and assessment that are appropriate and comparable in quality to other accredited programs offered by the institution
 - have access to appropriate and necessary program resources, academic and personal support services, and instruction from program faculty/staff
3. Program faculty/staff
 - have access to adequate resources to support appropriate instructional design and delivery of distributed education and distance learning coursework
 - can support the implementation and maintenance of distributed education from a human resources perspective
4. All courses offered at a distributed education site or through distance learning
 - are part of a comprehensive curriculum plan that demonstrates effective integration between educational components offered at the traditional program (if one exists) and in the distributed education sites/courses
 - are taught by qualified faculty in accordance with the college/university standards
 - result in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the diploma awarded
 - provide for appropriate participation and interaction between and amongst faculty and students
 - include appropriate pedagogy to match the mode of delivery, the content, and the level of student
 - include evaluative components to assess student performance appropriate to the method of delivery and appropriate to the knowledge, skills, and behaviours being assessed
5. Technology adequately ensures the quality and effectiveness of the learning environment.

6. Evidence of substantial interactivity between students and faculty should be expected even in situations without full-time or conventional faculty. The delivery methods must contribute to and enhance the creation of academic community among students and between students and faculty. For online learning elements, this includes that:
 - a. the program/course design and the course syllabus make appropriate provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction
 - b. the technologies used to achieve interactions among faculty and students (e.g., email, telephone office hours, phone conferences, voicemail, fax, chat rooms, web-based discussions, computer conferences and threaded discussions) are adequate
 - c. The instructor maintains a presence and interacts with students in a variety of ways throughout the course.
 - The instructor fosters a supportive learning environment for students.
 - The instructor sets and meets expectations for instructor responsiveness and availability (e.g., turn-around time for email and discussion forum postings, feedback on assignments, etc.)

See [APPENDIX 1](#) for explanatory notes relating to distributed education and distance learning within the Accreditation Standards.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

While preparing the Self Study Report, education programs offering both onsite and distributed/distance learning are required to address each delivery mode wherever there are differences in how the programs meet specific accreditation criteria.

In programs offered fully by distributed education/distance learning, it is required that, in addition to fieldwork placements, there are student opportunities for hands-on learning in lab sessions and that hands-on competence of students is assessed through lab exams or OSCEs. Lab skills sessions and lab assessments must be provided by a faculty member/instructor hired by the institution, oriented to the program, and evaluated as an instructor. It is not required that lab sessions and assessments take place on campus.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEER REVIEW TEAMS

The onus lies with the education program to prove the delivery of the distributed/distance learning program is successful in the creation of competent graduates. Peer Review Team members must verify through intentional interviewing and review of available evidence that graduates who are recipients of distributed/distance learning programs demonstrate the competencies described in Standard 6 OTA and Standard 6 PTA of the 2012 OTA & PTA EAP Accreditation Standards.

Specific questions for interviews:

- Consider quality of delivery as well as delivery method, i.e. are essential concepts introduced, reinforced, and emphasized?
- How do students and instructors interact? Are responses to questions and feedback from assessments timely? Is there opportunity for adequate participation and problem-solving?
- How does the program ensure the integrity of assessment and evaluation for students learning online or offsite? Are exams suitably proctored? Are lab skills adequately assessed?
- Did instructors at the distributed education site or who teach distance learning courses receive different/additional training? (Different pedagogy requires different skills)
- What resources are available to students? Are appropriate and comparable lab spaces, facilities, and equipment available for student instruction?
- How does the learning platform support course work? Is it easy to navigate, is it updated/maintained?
- What services are available to students? E.g.: IT, academic advising, academic counselling, etc.

Other more specific considerations for PRT members:

- Outlines for the same course offered in both distance and in-person delivery formats should be different, as there will be differences in how the courses are delivered, different timing for exams, different exam formats, differences in group projects, etc. If course outlines are not different, the program should be able to describe why not.

See examples of Sample Questions in the PRT Handbook

Policy Number: GUIDE-08	
Last Revised	Associated documents
October 2014	<i>ACC-03 Accreditation Decisions</i>
July 2018	<i>ACC-08 Distributed Education</i>

APPENDIX 1

The following outlines the Explanatory Notes related to distributed education and distance learning. For a full listing of Explanatory Notes, please refer to the 2012 Accreditation Standards (2016 revision).

Standard 1 The Educational Program and its Environment

1.5 CORE

The program has adequate financial resources to achieve its stated goals and objectives and assure its continuing operation.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

The budget and financial reports adequately:

- a. confirm a commitment institutionally (in budgets and policies) to provide and maintain the necessary technological supports, student supports, and training resources for programs which offer distributed/distance education, and to supplement them as necessary.
- b. demonstrate that faculty/staff have access to appropriate and adequate resources for instructional design and delivery of distributed/distance learning coursework
- c. identify resources to acquaint faculty, students, and course designers with new software or systems as they are adopted;

1.6 **The program has adequate administrative and technical support staff and services to meet the needs of the faculty and students and achieve the goals and objectives of the program.**

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

The evidence would adequately illustrate the criterion by demonstration and/or commentary such as:

- The number and skills of administrative, secretarial and technical personnel assigned provides sufficient support services for the program including support for any portion of the program offered by distributed education/distance learning.
- The program assures that support services are available to facilitate faculty and students in meeting their academic obligations to the program.
- There is evidence of ongoing monitoring and enhancement of the technology infrastructure of the institution, including well-maintained, current, and appropriate hardware, software, and other technological resources and media.

- Students/faculty are always able to securely access the materials for web-delivered courses, except for regularly scheduled maintenance with adequate notice provided.
- There is evidence of a process to prepare and orient students and faculty to existing and new technologies
- There is accessible technical assistance for students and faculty for all hardware, software, and delivery systems specified by the organization as required for the program.

1.7 The program provides adequate quality, quantity and variety of learning resources (e.g. equipment, materials, physical space) to enable students to achieve learning objectives.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning
For programs offering distributed/distance education:

- a. Services are available to enable all students to achieve their learning objectives and include counseling services, library services, academic services including academic advising, disability services, technical support services, and financial aid services
- b. The services available to distributed education/distance learning students are comparable to those available to students in the traditional education delivery models.

1.8 There is a formal plan for the curriculum.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- Programs offering distributed/distance learning ensure a comprehensive curriculum plan that demonstrates effective integration between educational components offered at the established program and in the distributed education /distance learning courses.
- Delivery methods are appropriate to course content and design.
- Where a program is offered both in the classroom and via distributed education/distance learning, the distributed education/distance learning component of the program is either:
 - a. described within the conceptual framework; or
 - b. modifications to the framework for onsite learning that have been made to accommodate the distributed education /distance learning component are clearly described in a separate document

Standard 2 Faculty

- 2.1 The number and qualifications of faculty meet the program’s mission, goals, and objectives through education administration, curriculum development, instructional design and delivery, and evaluation of outcomes.**

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- Faculty expertise covers all areas of curriculum content, and includes knowledge of and expertise in the mode of content delivery (e.g., distributed education/distance learning).

- 2.2 The educational institution and the program encourage and support career development of faculty relevant to their roles in the program, including support for new/junior faculty.**

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- The faculty development activities are linked to the needs of the program. In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, professional development activities promoting effective teaching and course development in a distributed education/distance learning environment are provided/supported.

- 2.3 Faculty members are evaluated in accordance with institutional policies and with reference to clearly outlined criteria using multiple sources of information.**

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- There are clearly outlined criteria for evaluating faculty members teaching in programs offering distributed education/distance learning.
- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, faculty are adequately evaluated in their ability to deliver their distributed/distance course(s).

- 2.4 The program supports the role of faculty in collaborating to develop, implement and evaluate the curriculum.**

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed/distance learning, regardless of the source of courseware development, the ultimate knowledge, skills, and competency levels contained in the courseware should be determined by faculty possessing the appropriate academic and professional experience.

- Where a program is offered both in the classroom and via distributed education/distance learning, there is a clear and integral relationship between the faculty and instructors involved in distributed/distance learning and those who are classroom-based, including coordination of course requirements.

Standard 3 Students

3.1 The program ensures effective administration and coordination of student education throughout the course of study.

3.1.1 The confidentiality of student academic records is assured.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, there are established policies and processes to ensure verification of the identity of the student and the integrity of assessment components while at the same time protecting student privacy.

3.2 Students have opportunities to participate in academic activities such as program planning, development, and evaluation.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- Programs ensure those students receiving distributed education/distance learning have opportunity to participate in comparable opportunities for provision of feedback to the program.

3.4 The program provides clinical education / fieldwork experiences in occupational therapy and physiotherapy that enable students to achieve the learning outcomes.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- Programs offering distributed education/distance learning MUST include the required fieldwork hours for clinical placement experience. This component of the education program cannot be offered using a distributed education/distance learning delivery method. However, programs may use distributed education/distance learning delivery methods as a component of a field placement course for purposes of discussion of field placement experiences with the instructor or amongst students.

3.6 The program ensures students have timely and confidential access as required to academic support and/or psychosocial counselling.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- Professional and career counseling and academic support are available to students enrolled in the program, including those students in distributed education/distance learning courses.

Standard 4 Program Evaluation

4.1 There is a documented plan for program evaluation that is based on clearly defined and measurable goals.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed/distance learning, reliable and valid performance measures for distributed education/distance learning are identified within the program's evaluation plan.

4.3 The program analyzes and synthesizes program evaluation data to identify need for change.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning to one cohort, while another cohort receives a traditional delivery method, an analysis is provided demonstrating that the outcomes for the different cohorts of graduates are comparable.
- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, analysis includes assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the delivery method, and availability and suitability of technical and other supports from instructor, student and administrative perspectives.

Standard 5 Accountability

5.1 Current and accurate information about the program is available to applicants, enrolled students, and the public about:

- institutional and program admission policies,
- language requirements,
- prior learning assessment process,
- tuition and fees,
- financial aid,
- graduation and credentialing requirements,
- academic policies and appeal processes, and
- student services.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, potential students are fully informed about:
 - the technological software and devices required to begin the program, and the skills that students will require to begin (or will learn during) the program;
 - the nature of learning and the personal discipline required in an anytime/anywhere environment;
 - any additional costs, beyond tuition and ancillary fees, associated with distributed education/distance learning aspects of course/program delivery; and
 - the kind of support and protection available to them.

5.3 The program provides a culture and environment that is safe and protects the rights, privacy, and confidentiality of all individuals, including students, faculty, staff and others participating in associated activities.

Explanatory Notes Related to Distributed Education and Distance Learning

- In programs offering distributed education/distance learning, the program has clear processes and policies to:
 - establish that the student who registers for the course(s) is the same student who participates in and completes the course(s) and receives the academic credit, while at the same time protecting student privacy,
 - verify the identity of the individual being evaluated, while at the same time protecting student privacy,

- ensure the secure destruction of personal data when it is no longer needed,
and
- demonstrate risk assessment and planning, including a disaster recovery plan,
back-up and storage technology protocols, and a requirement for historical logs
and physical documentation.

APPENDIX 2

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS: CURRENT AS OF APRIL 2018

No Significant Difference

nonsignificantdifference.org

The No Significant Difference (NSD) website has been designed to serve as a companion piece to Thomas L. Russell's book, "The No Significant Difference Phenomenon: A Comparative Research Annotated Bibliography on Technology for Distance Education" (2001, IDECC, fifth edition). The book is a fully indexed, comprehensive research bibliography of 355 research reports, summaries and papers that document no significant difference (NSD) in student outcomes based on the mode of education delivery (face to face or at a distance). The primary purpose of the NSD website is to expand on the offerings from the book by providing access to appropriate studies published or discovered after the release of the book. In addition to studies that document no significant difference (NSD), the website includes studies which do document significant differences in student outcomes based on the mode of education delivery. The significant difference (SD) entries on the website are further classified into three categories:

better results through technology - improvement in outcomes when curriculum is delivered at a distance;

better results in the classroom - improvement in outcomes when curriculum is delivered face to face; or

mixed results - some variables indicate improvement when curriculum is delivered at a distance, while others indicate improvement when curriculum is delivered face-to-face.

Quality guidelines for online courses – University of Waterloo resource

<https://uwaterloo.ca/extended-learning/teach-online/creating-online-course/quality-guidelines>

Distance Education Training Commission

<https://www.deac.org/Seeking-Accreditation/The-DEAC-Accrediting-Handbook.aspx>

Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board – PEQAB

An arms-length advisory agency that makes recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities of Ontario on applications for ministerial consent under the terms of the Post-Secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000

Delivering Online Degree Programming

<http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/HNDBKCAAT2014.pdf>

The Board has four standards relevant to the review of an institution's capacity to use online technology in the delivery of its degree programs:

1. Program Delivery - The delivery methods support achievement of the expected and actual learning outcomes
2. Capacity to Deliver - The applicant has the capacity to deliver the quality of education necessary for students to attain the stated and necessary learning outcomes.
3. Academic Freedom and Integrity - The applicant maintains an atmosphere in which academic freedom exists and in which students and academic staff are expected to display a high degree of intellectual independence. Academic activity is supported by policies, procedures, and practices that encourage academic honesty and integrity. (2 Benchmarks to meet)
4. Student Protection - The applicant values and upholds integrity and ethical conduct in its relations with students