

Distance and Electronically Mediated Education in Doctoral Programs (Commission on Accreditation, November 2009)

The growth of technology has increased the options for how instruction can be delivered within psychology doctoral programs. Traditional methods of teaching and interaction in the same time and place are no longer the only available approach to instruction. The CoA recognizes that accredited doctoral programs may utilize distance and electronically mediated delivery formats.

The CoA defines distance and electronically mediated education in the following manner, consistent with definitions from the APA Task Force on Distance Education and Training in Professional Psychology (June 2002, page 4) as well as definitions specified by other higher education accreditation organizations.

Distance education is defined as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous (students and instructors present at the same time) or asynchronous (students and instructors access materials on their own schedule). Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

Electronically mediated education covers a wide set of electronic applications and processes such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. It includes the delivery of content via Internet, intranet/extranet (LAN/WAN), audio and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, and CD-ROM.

Although the *Guidelines and Principles for Accreditation of Programs in Professional Psychology* (G&P) do not set a pre-determined limit on the extent of distance education that is permitted, a doctoral program delivering education and training substantially or completely by distance education is not compatible with the G&P and could not be accredited. This is because direct interaction with faculty members and students is necessary to achieve many essential components of the G&P that are critical to education and training in professional psychology, including socialization and peer interaction, faculty role modeling, and the development and assessment of competencies.

The following elements are specifically noted for all accredited and applicant doctoral programs:

- Practicum experiences must be conducted face-to-face and cannot be completed through distance education (i.e., virtual clients) or other electronically mediated education;
- Telesupervision of students within practicum experiences would be governed through a separate (proposed) Implementing Regulation;
- Programs delivering distance education or utilizing electronically mediated formats are expected to follow generally accepted best practices in distance education and electronically mediated delivery;
- All accredited programs are expected to clearly describe to the CoA in their self-studies which aspects of their education and training utilize distance or electronically mediated delivery formats.

Programs delivering distance education or utilizing electronically mediated formats are expected to describe how they meet all standards of the G&P, as is true of all programs that are accredited or are seeking accreditation. In their self-studies, such programs are expected to pay particular attention to how distance or electronically mediated delivery is related to specific issues within the G&P, including *but not limited to* the following areas:

- The program is an integral part of the mission of the academic unit in which it resides (A.3)
- The program requires at least 1 year in full-time residency (or the equivalent) (A.4, *see IR C-2*)
- Formal written policies are available concerning admissions and degree requirements; financial and administrative assistance; student performance evaluation, feedback, advisement, retention and termination decisions; due process and grievance procedure for students and faculty (A.6)
- Education is sequential, cumulative, and graded in complexity (B.1b)
- Students demonstrate substantial understanding of and competence in the required areas (B.3)
- The program requires adequate and appropriate practicum experiences (B.4)
- The program integrates the practicum component with other program elements including provision of adequate forums for the discussion of the practicum experience (B.4b)
- The program has an identifiable core faculty who function as an integral part of the academic unit (C.1b)
- The program has an identifiable core faculty sufficient in number for the necessary academic responsibilities (C.1c)
- The program has an identifiable core faculty who are available and function as role models for students (C.1f)
- Adjunct faculty are held to standards of competence appropriate to their role/contribution within the program (C.1)
- The program has an identifiable body of students sufficient in number to ensure opportunities for meaningful peer interaction, support, and socialization (C.2a)
- The program has an identifiable body of students who by interest, aptitude, and prior achievement are qualified for the program (C.2b)
- The program has additional resources needed to accomplish its goals and objectives in the required areas (C.3)
- The program has made systematic and long-term efforts to attract and retain students and faculty from differing ethnic, racial, and personal backgrounds (D.1)
- The program ensures a supportive learning environment for training diverse individuals who represent a broad cultural and individual spectrum (D.1)
- Faculty members are accessible to students, provide guidance and supervision that encourages timely completion, and serve as role models who promote students' acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies (E.2)
- The program, with appropriate involvement from its students, engages in regular, ongoing self-study (F.1)
- Self-study addresses program effectiveness in achieving program goals and objectives in terms of outcome data while students are in the program and after completion (F.1a)
- The program periodically and systematically reviews its goals and objectives, training model, curriculum, and the outcome data relative to national standards of professional practice (F.2c)
- The program describes itself accurately and completely in documents available to current students, prospective students, and other "publics" (G.1a)
- The program informs the CoA in a timely manner of changes in its environment, plans, resources, or operations that could alter the program's quality (H.2)