



TO: Chief Executive Officers
Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers

FROM: Marty J. Alvarado, Executive Vice Chancellor, Educational Services & Support
John Stankas, ASCCC President

RE: Emergency Guidance for Correspondence Education

The COVID-19 state of emergency has forced colleges to suspend in-person face-to-face courses and convert to alternative methods of instructional delivery. While many courses have converted to online distance education formats, the transition has also prompted some courses to transition to a correspondence education instructional delivery method. This memo provides clarification on correspondence education policies and expectations to ensure colleges are reviewing current semester transitions and can effectively advance contingency planning for Summer and Fall terms.

Background and Policy Development

Correspondence education is an alternative delivery method that, previously, was included under the distance education definition. To ensure compliance and alignment with federal definitions, which explicitly state that correspondence education is not distance education, correspondence education references were removed from the distance education regulations. Since that time, the statewide curriculum committee, California Community College Curriculum Committee (5C), has been drafting recommendations for a set of title 5 regulations that would establish a definition and expectations for the delivery of correspondence education. At this time, in the absence of formal state regulations, colleges should reference the established federal definition for correspondence education provided here:

Correspondence education means education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education.¹

¹ 34 C.F.R. § 602.3

Guidance for instructor/student contact within a correspondence education modality includes that regular effective asynchronous contact between instructor and students should occur in order to facilitate a progression of learning through an established cycle of assignment submissions and delivery of effective feedback. Students participating in courses conducted through correspondence education should also have access to the instructor and to student support services, including counseling, library services and research assistance, and tutoring or learning support, via mail, email, telephone, or in-person.

It is important to be clear on the distinction between distance education and correspondence education and document what format courses are using during the transition. For ease of reference the following are key distinction points between the two instructional modalities.

- Correspondence education is delivered asynchronously only while distance education may be either synchronous or asynchronous.
- Correspondence courses do not include peer-to-peer student interactions while distance education, per recent changes to title 5, section 55204, must include interactions among students, which may include group activities, assignments, or discussions or in-person engagements such as field trips.
- Progress in correspondence education is primarily student-paced due to the limitations and circumstances of their accessibility to interact on a set schedule. Progress in a distance education course remains instructor-paced and relatively consistent for all students.
- Due to restricted access, correspondence education courses may have limited student/instructor interactions while distance education is required to maintain substantive student/instructor interactions.

Both modalities require that support services are made available to students, including support for students with disabilities. Both modalities also require faculty to play a proactive role in the development and progress of learning through substantive feedback and the development of responsive assignments and course materials. It is also important to note that correspondence education may also include the use of technology, such as email or shared virtual folders, for transmission of instructional materials, but this would not make it distance education.

Transitioning to a Correspondence Education Delivery Format

For all courses transitioning away from an in-person face-to-face modality, distance education and correspondence education are the only options available for continued instruction. Correspondence education remains an approved option for supporting students and faculty experiencing difficulties accessing face-to-face or distance education courses during this state of emergency and colleges should reference this guidance memo and federal regulations until state approved regulations are adopted.

For Summer and Fall 2020 terms, colleges should be clear on the modality of instruction and when courses may actually fall under the correspondence education method. Colleges are also recommended to ensure that a locally approved course addendum is completed for any course that will be offered via correspondence education. As an alternative instructional methodology, courses offered via correspondence education were previously required to have a locally approved course addendum and it is expected that this will continue to be a requirement in forthcoming title 5

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regulations.. As with distance education, programs that may convert to more than 50% correspondence education are still required to obtain approval from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC).

cc: Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor
Daisy Gonzales, Deputy Chancellor
Aisha Lowe, Vice Chancellor
Rhonda Mohr, Vice Chancellor
CCCCO Staff