Distance Learning Programs and Procedures

Written 08.09.07
Revised 04.14 Effective 07.01/14

Introduction

Adult education programs must strive to accommodate the needs of the individual student rather than the student "accommodate the needs of the program." A variety of educational opportunities must be afforded adult learners to meet their needs; and at the same time, allow for programs to maintain integrity and rigor. Inasmuch as adult education learners find it difficult to "arrange" their time to participate in rigorous "site specific" adult education programs distance learning may be an educational delivery option.

Purpose

The purpose of distance learning is two-fold: 1. to provide programs with an alternative educational instruction delivery system to increase program intensity and extend educational offerings for adult learners who, for a variety of reasons are unable, due to geography and/or time, to attend or participate in traditional adult education programs in adult education centers, and 2. To provide programs with a method of offering students with supplemental instruction with the intent of increasing measureable instructional learning time and potential student academic gains.

Additionally, distance learning can be seen as a method of enticing individuals to participate in an adult education program in which they may otherwise choose not to participate.

Instructional opportunities for the student participating in distance learning must be parallel to curriculum and instruction offered in a classroom-based setting.

With all teaching, BEST practice always occurs in the classroom. As such, distance learning is *not* considered as a supplement to the classroom-based approach to teaching.

When Should a Distance Learning Approach be an Instructional Option?

- A student may be considered for distance learning when separated by geography, time or both for the majority of the instructional period.

- Programs with typically less then twelve enrollees attending a "traditional" adult education program on a *consistent* basis are encouraged to consider distance learning.

Or

- Programs may consider distance learning as an alternative services approach that might meet the needs of the learner that could, or wants to, move quicker than the traditional class structure allows.

Program Considerations in Using Distance Learning

- When considering distance learning as a delivery option programs need to remember that outcomes from this approach may reduce total program outcomes. Outcomes (contact hours, level gains and credits) may be limited due to the students not receiving the same level of program staff monitoring that typically is associated with a learning center approach to instruction.

- Distance learning is not a panacea for all students.

- Distance learning requires the student to be an independent, self-directed, motivated learner who does not require a large amount of teacher direction or interaction.

- A variety of instructional materials meeting the student's needs must be considered in meeting the student's needs including print, audio recordings, videotape, computer software, web-based programs or other online technology.

Programming Approaches for Students Who are Enrolled Only in Distance Learning

1. Supported Distance Learning

The distance learning student spends instructional time "at a distance".

- The teacher assigns work and establishes a schedule for submission of assignments and feedback.

- The student is required to complete six hours of work weekly with the teacher providing 30 minutes of weekly feedback to the student.

- The student completes and returns all assignments electronically or through the U.S. mail (institutional in the case of corrections education).

- At the completion of an instructional unit the student meets at a central program location to complete appropriate unit culminating exams that must be proctored by an adult educator.

2. Blended Distance Learning

This approach combines distance education with face-to-face instruction. However the majority of the student's participation must be "at a distance".

- Primary instruction takes place at a distance.
- The student is expected to complete an academic assignment packet every two weeks.
- The student is required to participate in face-to-face teacher/student instruction for 30 minutes weekly.
- As the teacher prepares instructional materials, consideration should be given to the fact that one instructional hour spent in a traditional lecture type of class is equal to twelve hours that would be expected of a student to complete the same type of assignment outcomes using this approach.
- Face-to-face interaction between the student and teacher may also be provided, as additional support for the student, in a tutoring lab on a drop-in-as-needed basis. The focus of the additional face-to-face drop-in interaction is to provide time for the student to receive clarification of difficult assignments.

Instructional Presentation Models

In both distance learning approaches, as well as supplemental instructional delivery options, three models of presentation may be considered as a proxy for contact hours of instruction.

1. Teacher Verification Model

- Program establishes a standard for assignment completion equal to the minimum amount of time a student would need to spend to complete a particular unit of instruction given that typical classroom instruction is 40 hours (lecture and assignments) which is equal to a .25 unit of credit.
- Teacher certifies assignments are completed.
- Academic outcomes are based on "content completed not quality of completion".
  Example: GED® Connections – completing 75% of questions takes about 30 hours to complete.
- Mastery of course material is based on successful completion of unit exams and or unit portfolios.

2. **Learner Mastery Model**
    - Student demonstrates unit mastery by testing.
    - "Panel of experts" sets a formula to translate instruction into contact hours. Example: If the student earns 70% accuracy on questions per a unit of instruction the "panel of experts" would equate the score to a certain number of contact hours. Thus 70% on a Crossroads Café unit may equal 10 contact hours; whereas 70% on English for All unit may only equal 6 hours.
    - When the student "feels they have mastered the material," mastery is demonstrated through an instructional unit test.
    - Students "clepping" from a course of instruction equals 50% of the instructional contact hours that the student would have generated if the student had actually completed the course in a "traditional adult education center" approach to instruction.

3. **Clock Time Model**
    - Curriculum presented online contains a "tutor" tracking time on task.
    - Actual number of minutes = actual minutes/hours of contact hours.
    - The online curriculum must have a pre-set inactivity log-out function built into the program. Whereby, when the student stops working for more than a certain number of minutes the system logs them out. The time tracking feature of the program ensures time data collected reflects student effort.
    - Example: Plato, Rosetta Stone, Skills Tutor, NovaNet or A+

Program Responsibilities

Regardless of the approach (es) that a program chooses it is expected that state policies are followed including:

- Distance learning students are those who, by geography and/or time, or by choice, choose to not participate in a "traditional adult education center" approach program. Therefore, programs offering distance learning as a viable instructional approach to adult education must offer program orientation and "class meeting times" at times other than the "traditional" program. This may include meeting on weekends, at the local library in the evenings, at a local church, a place of business, cell blocks, or lock-down units etc.

- The selection of teachers to provide distance learning is critical to the program's success. Teachers must be flexible, innovative, and creative. Dealing with the distance learner presents challenges different from a traditional classroom; thus it is essential that a distance education teacher work with students in a "learner-centered" approach to teaching. A strong sense of curriculum and being technologically adept is critical to student and program success.

- Programs must establish day-to-day policies including:
  Program standards—including: "what the program will look like", organizational change, the work schedule of the teaching staff, data collection
  Orientation—content of distance education orientation including study skills and organizational skills
  Outcomes—how, when, where student will complete curriculum mastery assessments
  Communication standards—how teacher and student will communicate: Email, institutional mail, telephone, drop-in to the office in addition to the frequency of the communication
  Daily Operations—hours, virtual office hours, etc.
  Tuition and fees—what is to be charged for material rentals etc.
  Note: all collected fees and/or tuition must be reported to the program's business administrator per Fiscal Compliance Policy for reporting to the Office of Vocation and Adult Education.
  On-going equipment maintenance—establish procedures to ensure that Web-based programs and software are in working order 24/7.

- Distance learning students must be enrollees having completed 12 contact hours that include a full assessment, EFL, and the completion of an SEOP, defining student educational goal(s). As part of the initial 12 hours, distance learning students are required to participate in an orientation specific to distance education that includes the completion of study skills and organizational skills modules as well as an orientation to the curriculum and program expectations. Additionally, the process for assigning work, setting course completion timelines and establishing expectations regarding teacher feedback are to be included as part of the orientation meeting. The hours spent participating in the orientation would be considered non-instructional contact hours.

- Distance learning ABE/AHSC students, must have a full TABE assessment (including Locator Test) administered at an adult education center demonstrating a reading scale score performance level of ABE 3 or higher.

- Distance learning may be a supplemental learning option for ESL students who have an EFL of ESL 3 or higher in either speaking/listening or reading/writing.

- For the National Reporting System (NRS) reporting purposes only, at a minimum, 85% of the distance learning student's instructional contact hours must be at a distance. If this is not the case the student is considered a "traditional classroom adult education student" rather than a distance education student. However, if the student is in need of academic classroom "study lab" support, as part of the Blended Distance Learning program then latitude may be given allowing the program to still "count" the student as a distance learning student.

- Non-instructional contact hours may also include time spent in telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, between the staff and student. <u>The</u>

student's identity must be verifiable through whatever method of interaction the program selects.

- Instructional contact hours for the distance learning student include time spent using curriculum through a technology delivered clock-time model or time spent in courses specifically defined as distance learning curriculum through either the learner mastery model or the teacher verification model.

- Distance learning students may choose to take a combination of distance education classes and traditional adult education classes simultaneously to advance their learning and shorten their length of time to completion of their defined goal(s).

- Program staff must "meet with the distance learning student" at least weekly in person, via phone or email contact. The purpose of the meeting is to answer questions, encourage students, redirect students' program expectations, etc.

- Distance learning students must complete course unit competency tests at the local adult education center or a mutually agreed upon location in the presence of an adult education instructor.

- ABE/AHSC distance learning students, like "traditional" adult education students, should take a post-test after accruing 50 instructional contact hours or more, as deemed necessary in order to determine student and program level gains. For ESL distance learning students the post-testing parameters are the same as "in class" – 60 instructional contact hours. Regardless of whether or not the student participates in a "traditional" adult education or a distance learning program, all pre- and post-test assessments must be conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator following standardized assessment procedures.

- NOTE: Whether a student is ESL, ABE or AHSE their instructional contact hours must be entered into UTopia in the course called "Multi-discipline Distance Learning" (available for either open enrollment or managed enrollment). UTopia will "evaluate the student" at the end of the program year to determine if 85% of the student's instructional time was spent as a distance learner or a "traditional learning center" student. Depending on whether the 85% percent threshold is met, UTopia will determine for NRS reports, how the student outcomes will be reported – distance learning or "traditional learning center" student.

Determining Program Outcomes

All state adult education parameters will be followed in determining the effectiveness of successful distance learning outcomes.

- Level gains for a distance learning student are determined in the same manner as a "traditional" adult education student – through post-testing.

- Academic assessments must be completed face-to-face.

- Student goal outcomes will be measured following the standards established by the USOE for goal outcome follow-ups. Successes will be determined by the completion of follow-up surveys or by data matching if the student provides the program with a social security number for data matching purposes.

Distance Learning Implementation Requirements

In order for a program to initiate and continue with a distance learning approach, the following program standards must be included in the narrative section of the program's state grant application. Final approval of submitted Implementation Requirements will be made by the adult education state coordinator.

Local Program Standards:
The following components must be described in detail and submitted to the USOE for review and approval as part of the grant application prior to the implementation of a distance learning program.
Note: each distance learning student must receive the same written explanation of the program's distance learning expectations including:

1. A detailed description of the distance learning program orientation/intake process detailing the following:
    - Participation in distance learning requires the student to complete specific learning modules on study skills and organizational skills.
    - Include a description of the materials and course outline that will be used for the study skills and organizational skills modules.
    - Note: The hours spent participating in the orientation are considered non-instructional contact hours.

2. Distance learning orientation materials describing program standards, expectations and rules associated with participation in distance learning. The following must be included:
    - Timeframe for unit/course completion
    - How assignments will be given (a unit at a time, a packet at a time, etc.)
    - How assignments will be submitted – electronically, in person
    - How and when assignment feedback will be delivered to the student

- Expectations for when the distance education teacher will respond to student inquiries
- Frequency of teacher/student contact (i.e. one or two times weekly) to keep the student engaged and motivated to continue moving forward
- Parameters as to when the distance education program will cease/terminate due to lack of student activity
- Description of how the student will be able to access a telephone "help line" (where students may call and leave a message that a teacher responds to on a daily basis)

3. A description of the curricula that will be used in providing distance learning.

4. The instructional presentation model and the formula used to develop proxy contact hours for each type of curriculum utilized.

5. If the program chooses to use a clock time model, the program must be identified and approved by the state.

6. If a program chooses to use a combination of models (teacher verification model, learner mastery model) then the proxy contact hours developed for completing activities for each type of curriculum used must be identified and specifically defined.