



New England Commission of Higher Education

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## **Policy on the Review of Off-Campus Programming**

The New England Commission of Higher Education regards off-campus programming as an integral part of the institution and not peripheral to its objectives or other programs. It encourages and supports institutional efforts to extend higher education opportunities to previously unserved populations, and this statement is not meant to inhibit such activities or to diminish creative approaches to them.

In keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*, off-campus programming should be consistent with the educational objectives of the institution; maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus; receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs; and have reasonable access to appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality. On-campus faculty have a substantive role in the design and implementation of off-campus programs.

In conformity with federal regulations, this policy is applicable to those instructional sites where 50% or more of an academic program is offered or where a degree may be completed either at a Branch Campus or an Additional Instructional Location, as defined below. It is not applicable to short-term, non-credit, community service courses, nor to traditional credit-bearing courses offered on an occasional basis in response to constituency needs or interests. It also does not apply to asynchronous distance learning activities, which are treated under separate policies and procedures. In addition, the Commission has established supplementary policies and procedures for overseas educational programs and instructional locations for non-U.S. nationals.

Any questions about the applicability of this policy to specific institutional off-campus activities should be referred to the President of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

## **Branch Campus**

### **Definition**

In keeping with Federal Regulations, a Branch Campus is defined as:

A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus which meets *all* of the following criteria:

- offers 50% or more of an academic program leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized credential, or at which a degree may be completed;
- is permanent in nature;
- has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization;
- has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

### **Accreditation**

Newly initiated Branch Campuses will not be automatically included in the institution's accreditation. The following procedures must be completed before a Branch Campus is encompassed within the scope of its accreditation by the New England Association.

### **Advance Notice to the Commission**

Establishing a Branch Campus represents a substantive change; institutions are referred to the Commission's Policy on Substantive Change. It is the responsibility of an institution to notify the Commission about its intention to establish a Branch Campus before it becomes operational and to provide a report about its plans for the projected activity following the "Guidelines for Preparing Reports on the Establishment of Off-Campus Programming". The report should demonstrate that the Branch Campus will fulfill all the *Standards for Accreditation*, with particular regard to:

- institutional mission;
- the educational programming to be offered;
- faculty, library, academic technological support, and student services including advising and counseling;
- operation, management, and physical resources at the Branch Campus including, if appropriate, legal authorization to conduct the activity;
- the institution's fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the Branch Campus;
- contractual agreements, if any, with non-regionally-accredited organizations which will recruit students and/or provide instruction or otherwise provide academic services in support of the Branch Campus. (An institution establishing a Branch Campus through a contractual relationship should address in its report the Commission's statement on "Good Practices in Contractual Arrangements Involving Courses and Programs.")

In addition, the report should include projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the Branch Campus.

An electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) and four (4) paper copies of the report should be submitted to the office of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Reports should be single-spaced, printed on both sides of the paper and stapled or clipped together. Please do not use three-ring binders or elaborate printing options.

### **Commission Review**

The institution's plans will be reviewed by the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting. Should the Commission conclude that the plans for the new Branch Campus appear to fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*, the new site will be considered as encompassed within the institution's accreditation. If approval is withheld, the reasons for doing so and subsequent steps will be specified.

The Commission cannot give retroactive approval to a new Branch Campus.

### **On-Site Evaluation**

As soon as possible, but within six months after it becomes operational, the Commission will undertake an on-site visit to the new Branch Campus. The purpose of the visit will be to assess the institution's success in implementing its plans for the new activity and to otherwise verify that the site has the personnel, facilities and resources as claimed in the report of notice to the Commission. In addition, the Commission may specify items for particular attention by the site visitor. The "Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit" will be followed in these reviews.

In addition, as noted below in "Ongoing Monitoring," a representative sample of all Branch Campuses will be visited during the institution's comprehensive evaluation.

## **Additional Instructional Location**

### **Definition**

An Additional Instructional Location is defined as:

any instructional site geographically apart from the main campus where 50% or more of a degree program is offered or where a degree may be completed, but which otherwise does not meet the definition of a Branch Campus.

### **Accreditation**

Institutional activities at Additional Instructional Locations are regularly assessed in keeping with the details outlined under heading *Ongoing Monitoring* below.

In cases when an Additional Instructional Location is not pre-approved (see below), the following procedures must be completed before an Additional Instructional Location is encompassed within the scope of the institution's accreditation by the New England Association.

### **Advance Notice to the Commission**

Adding an instructional location represents a substantive change; institutions are referred to the Commission's Policy on Substantive Change. It is the responsibility of an institution to notify the

Commission about its intention to establish an Additional Instructional Location before it becomes operational and to provide a report about its plans for the projected activity following the “Guidelines for Preparing Reports on the Establishment of Off-Campus Programming”. The report should demonstrate that the institution will fulfill all the *Standards for Accreditation*, with particular regard to:

- institutional mission;
- the educational programming to be offered;
- faculty, library, academic technological support, and student services including advising and counseling;
- operation, management, and physical resources at the Additional Instructional Location including, if appropriate, legal authorization to conduct the activity;
- the institution's fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the Additional Instructional Location;
- contractual agreements, if any, with non-regionally-accredited organizations which will recruit students and/or provide instruction or otherwise provide academic services in support of the Additional Instructional Location. (An institution establishing an Additional Instructional Location through a contractual relationship should address in its report the Commission’s statement on “Good Practices in Contractual Arrangements Involving Courses and Programs.”)

In addition, the report should include projected revenues and expenditures for three years at the Additional Instructional Location.

In considering Additional Instructional Locations, the Commission’s interest includes the institution’s capacity to operate Additional Instructional Locations. Capacity is demonstrated through the institution's provision of evidence of a system to ensure quality that includes:

- (a) clearly identified academic control;
- (b) regular evaluation of the locations;
- (c) adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems;
- (d) financial stability; and
- (e) long-range planning for expansion.

An electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) and four (4) paper copies of the report should be submitted to the office of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Reports should be single-spaced, printed on both sides of the paper and stapled or clipped together. Please do not use three-ring binders or elaborate printing options.

### **Commission Review**

The institution’s plans will be reviewed by the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting. Should the Commission conclude that the plans for the Additional Instructional Location appear to fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*, the new site will be considered as encompassed within the institution’s accreditation. If approval is withheld, the reasons for doing so and subsequent steps will be specified.

The Commission cannot give retroactive approval to a new instructional location.

### **On Site Evaluation**

As soon as possible, but within six months after it becomes operational, the Commission will undertake an on-site visit to the new Additional Instructional Location. The purpose of the visit will be to assess the institution's success in implementing its plans for the new activity and to otherwise verify that the site has the personnel, facilities and resources as claimed in the report of notice to the Commission. In addition, the Commission may specify items for particular review by the site visitor. The "Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit" will be followed in these reviews.

### **Permission for Pre-Approval of Additional Instructional Locations**

In certain cases, the Commission may determine that an institution has the capacity to operate Additional Instructional Locations in keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*, without a prior substantive change proposal or six-month on-site evaluation. In such cases, the Commission will grant permission for such sites to be considered pre-approved upon notification being received at the office of the Commission. Such pre-approval is valid for no more than five years.

Pre-approval may be general within the U.S. only or limited by geography (e.g., New England states) or by type of program. Except as indicated below, pre-approved locations will be automatically included within the institution's accreditation, provided that notification has been provided to the Commission offices.

An institution's permission for pre-approved Additional Instructional Locations will be reaffirmed by the Commission during its review of the institution's fifth-year interim report and at the time of the comprehensive evaluation.

No international sites may be pre-approved.

Additional Instructional Locations will not be pre-approved or automatically included in an institution's accreditation when the institution meets any of the following criteria:

- has three or fewer Additional Instructional Locations;
- has not demonstrated that it has a proven record of successful oversight of Additional Instructional Locations, as defined above;
- has been accredited for fewer than ten years;
- experiences rapid growth in the number of Additional Instructional Locations;
- has been placed on show-cause or probation or is subject to some limitation on its accreditation or candidacy status.

An institution that undergoes a change of ownership must reestablish eligibility for pre-approval of Additional Instructional Locations. Such locations will not automatically be included in the institution's accreditation until the institution has established at least three (additional) sites, been accredited for at least ten years under the new ownership, and has demonstrated its successful oversight of off-campus instructional locations.

## **Ongoing Monitoring of Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations**

Ongoing monitoring takes four forms:

First, each spring, the institution reports information about all its off-campus programming on its Annual Report Form.

Second, in taking action to review a site visit report of a new Branch Campus or Additional Instructional Location, the Commission may specify further monitoring in the form of a progress report or focused evaluation. Typically, such actions will be taken to measure the institution's success in addressing identified concerns specific to a location or locations, when there has been a significant growth in the number of off-campus sites, or where there are concerns as to the institution's capacity to maintain off-campus programming in keeping with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Third, as a part of the fifth-year interim report required of all colleges and universities on a ten-year evaluation cycle, the institution is expected to address all off-campus programming. A representative sample of pre-approved locations added since the last comprehensive evaluation will be visited at the time of the fifth-year interim report.

Fourth, all off-campus programming will be specifically reviewed through the comprehensive evaluation. The institution is expected to appropriately address such off-campus activities in its self-study report. A representative sample of the institution's Branch Campuses and Additional Instructional Locations will be visited as a part of each comprehensive evaluation. Commission's staff, in consultation with the institution and the team chair, will review the number, enrollments, and geographic distribution of the institution's off-campus locations and determine an appropriate representative sample. If an institution has two or more off-campus locations, no fewer than two sites will be visited. If an institution has off-campus locations in states other than that of the main campus, at least one out-of-state campus will be visited. If the institution has off-campus locations outside the United States, at least one overseas campus will be visited.

*This policy supersedes the Commission's prior policy statement, dated 3/7/97, "Policy and Procedures on the Establishment of a Branch Campus."*

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November 2003  
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