

Principles of Good Practice

Credit courses offered electronically for academic degree, certificate programs

Introduction

Many Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) states are relying on digital technology and telecommunications to respond to student enrollment growth, regional disparities in services, economic development initiatives, workforce preparation requirements and in-service training for teachers and faculty. Distance learning, whether delivered via satellite, cable, or telephone line, is an increasingly common element in most SREB state education plans.

Properly conceived and delivered, distance learning will help states avoid costly duplication of programs and systems, while providing opportunities for educational and in-service training. We understand that states do not have sufficient resources to develop the necessary degree programs or distance learning systems in every state or institution.

The SREB Educational Technology Cooperative has determined that a distance learning arrangement is needed in the region to serve the needs of students, schools and colleges. This distance learning arrangement will be called the Electronic Common Market (ECM). It will be designed to deliver programs and courses to students electronically. All states will make available an array of learning opportunities that are much less tied to a specific place and time.

The first step in the creation of the Electronic Common Market was the development and acceptance of the *Principles Of Good Practice For Distance Learning*.^{*} This document drew upon the work of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and other organizations. It presents the principles of good practice, or standards, by which programs and courses will be judged. This verification process is essential to ensure quality offerings to students.

The goal of the ECM is to make needed courses and programs available to citizens in the SREB states. Because of this, it was important that we clarify the rules and regulations related to approving out-of-state institutions to deliver courses in each of the participating states. A survey of statutes and administrative procedures has been completed. The results of this survey are reported in the *Survey Report of SREB State Regulations as They Apply to Distance Learning*. This report contains valuable data analyzing regulatory barriers that would inhibit the development of an electronic common market.

It is extremely important to note as stated in the report, "While some barriers do exist that preclude certain models of strategies, there appear to be no *significant* regulatory considerations that would halt the development of such a regional approach."

^{*} Portions are from the statement *Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs*, Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, Denver, Colorado, 1996.

Scope of the Electronic Common Market Program ---

The scope of the programs and courses addressed during the initial implementation of the SREB Educational Technology Cooperative's Electronic Common Market will be limited to public higher education academic degree and certificate programs and credit courses offered electronically.

Non-credit professional development programs, offerings from private institutions and private sector offerings are among those which will be addressed later as the Electronic Common Market becomes established.

Use of Principles ---

The purpose of the *Principles of Good Practice for Academic Degree and Certificate Programs and Credit Courses Offered Electronically* is to identify the expectations and requirements for participation in the Electronic Common Market. Each institution that seeks to offer an electronically-delivered program or course will be asked to certify that it complies with these standards. Quality control is the responsibility of the offering institution and its state ECM administrator. The *Principles* will be used to:

- guide the development of electronically-delivered courses to ensure that characteristics of good teaching and learning are addressed;
- certify at the institutional level the quality of the program or course which is seeking acceptance by the ECM;
- certify at the state higher education agency level the quality of the program or course which is seeking acceptance by the ECM; and
- verify and accept the program or course for placement on the SREB Educational Technology Cooperative's Electronic Catalog for students residing in the SREB region or enrolled in an SREB region higher education institution.

Basic Assumptions ---

Several assumptions are central to these principles:

1. The program or course offered electronically is provided by or through an institution that is accredited by a nationally-recognized accrediting body and authorized to operate in the state where the program or course originates.
2. The institution's programs holding specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when offered electronically.
3. The institution may be a single institution or a consortium of institutions.
4. These principles are generally applicable to degree or certificate programs and to courses offered for academic credit.
5. It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs and courses it provides electronically and certify continued compliance with these principles.
6. Participation in the Electronic Common Market will be coordinated by the appropriate state agency or organizations in the state where it is offered.
7. Institutions offering programs or for-credit courses are responsible for satisfying all in-state approval and accreditation requirements before students are enrolled.

8. Participating states agree to accept, in addition to other state regulations or policies, certification of compliance with the *Principles of Good Practice* by the offering institution and the state where the offering institution is located.
9. Priority shall be given in enrolling students for ECM courses and programs who are otherwise qualified residents of the SREB region.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Each program or course of study results in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.
- A degree or certificate program offered electronically is coherent and complete.
- The course provides for appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students.
- Qualified faculty provide appropriate supervision of the program/course that is offered electronically.
- Academic standards for all programs or courses offered electronically will be the same as those for other programs or courses offered at the institution where the programs originate.
- Student learning in programs delivered electronically should be comparable to student learning in programs offered at the campus where the programs originate.

Institutional Context and Commitment

Role and Mission

- The program is consistent with the institution's role and mission.
- Review and approval processes ensure the appropriateness of the technology being used to meet program or course objectives.

Students and Student Services

- The program or course provides students with clear, complete and timely information about the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, assumptions about technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services and financial aid resources, and costs and payment policies.
- Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and student rights to support their learning.
- The institution has admission/acceptance criteria in place to assess whether the student has the background, knowledge and technical skills required to undertake the course/program.
- Advertising, recruiting and admissions materials clearly and accurately present the program and the services available.

Faculty Support

- The program provides faculty support services specifically related to teaching via an electronic system.
- The institution assures appropriate training for faculty who teach using technology.
- The program provides adequate equipment, software and communications to faculty for interaction with students, institutions and other faculty.

Resources for Learning

- The program ensures that appropriate learning resources are available to students.
- The program evaluates the adequacy of, and the cost to students for, access to learning resources. It also documents the use of electronic resources.

Commitment to Support

- Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate recognition of teaching and scholarly activities related to programs or courses offered electronically.
- The institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to continuation of the program or course for a period sufficient for students to complete a degree or certificate.

Evaluation and Assessment

- The institution evaluates program and course effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction.
- At the completion of the program or course the institution provides for assessment and documentation of student achievement in each course.
- Program or course announcements and electronic catalog entries provide appropriate information.
- Common standards based on the *Principles of Good Practice* are used to evaluate courses and programs offered through ECM.