

**TEXAS TEAM EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**A Guideline for Distance Education in Texas Nursing Education Programs**  
**Provided through introductory information and power-point slides**  
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**Sub-Goal of the Texas Team Education Committee:**

4.4 Develop a faculty student distance learning model using technology

**Introduction:**

**Rationale:**

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report calls for nurses to “achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression” (pp. 6-7). A major challenge to achieving this goal is the need for accessible programs that allow working nurses to pursue their education at times and places convenient to them. One solution that has become increasingly popular is to provide nursing education through distance education with seamless pathways toward advanced degrees. Distance education enables students to earn education credits while they are fulfilling other life demands and responsibilities. This guideline has been developed to assist Texas nursing programs in the development and maintenance of high quality distance education, and to ensure consistent standards of quality in online nursing education.

**What is Distance Education?**

The definition of distance education used by the federal government to determine eligibility in Title IV programs is “education that uses one or more of the following technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously: Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio-conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the former technologies.” (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?rgn=div8&node=34:3.1.3.1.1.23.2>). From observation, online education has become a common form of distance education used in nursing education today.

The above definition is written from a general educational perspective and does not consider that nursing education requires that students engage in clinical learning experiences in the skills and simulation laboratories and through faculty-supervised hands-on patient care. Texas-approved nursing programs that utilize distance education accommodate the clinical practice through scheduling practice experiences for students in nursing skills and simulation laboratories AND faculty-supervised hands-on care with actual patients.

The only mention of distance education for vocational and professional nursing programs in the Board of Nursing education rules is in Rule 214.9(b)(3) and 215.9(b)(3). These rules require that delivery of curricula through distance education comply with all sections of the education rules and ensure that students receiving instruction through distance education receive a comparable curriculum, supervised clinical learning experiences, and formative and summative evaluations as do students in on-campus program. The rules further require that faculty have “documented competencies specific to online education.” While schools of nursing must determine and define the competencies they require for online education (For example [https://www.e-education.psu.edu/files/OnlineTeachingCompetencies\\_FacEngagementSubcommittee.pdf](https://www.e-education.psu.edu/files/OnlineTeachingCompetencies_FacEngagementSubcommittee.pdf)), many schools define the competencies with guidance from specialty organizations focused in the area of online learning. Examples of these organizations include but are not limited to the Online Learning Consortium (<http://onlinelearningconsortium.org>) and Quality Matters (<https://www.qualitymatters.org>) (Mention of these organizations does not imply endorsement by the Board of Nursing.)

The use of best practices and ongoing assessment are key to the success of any online program (Shelton, 2011). Research has identified key elements for success in online educational programs. [For examples see: Online Learning Consortium (<http://onlinelearningconsortium.org>) and Quality Matters (<https://www.qualitymatters.org>)]. Programs should seek out this information when developing, implementing and assessing the quality of their programs. For example, programs may use the following elements (adapted from *Quality on the line: Benchmarks for success in Internet-based distance education*) as a checklist to assess the quality of their online education efforts:

- The institution provides support to maintain the infrastructure.
- Measures to maintain and ensure system security are in place.
- A set of established standards guide the course development.
- The program has a regular evaluation plan to measure the effectiveness of all aspects of the delivery system.
- The system is reliable and easy to use.
- Course objectives include requirements for student interaction with faculty and other students through a variety of methods.
- Faculty provide constructive feedback to student assignments in a timely manner.
- Instruction is included to assist students to determine the validity of online resources.
- A plan to evaluate students’ capabilities in online learning as well as an orientation to the methodologies is included.
- Course materials include a course description, objectives, student expectations, grading criteria, reading resources, and supplemental materials.
- Access to an online library is available to students and faculty.
- Students and faculty agree on assignment deadlines and faculty response times.
- Students are provided information about requirements in the program and services provided including admission criteria; progression policies; withdrawal policies; transfer policies; tuition, fees, and financial aid; academic calendar; graduation requirements; and all student services available.

- Students are provided with training to effectively use the available technologies and with support services to assist them with technical difficulties in a timely manner.
- Faculty have easy access to technical support and assistance.
- Assistance is provided to faculty in their transition from face-to-face courses to online teaching.
- An evaluation of faculty effectiveness using the technologies is included in faculty evaluation.
- Faculty are provided with materials related to effective online instruction.
- An evaluation of all aspects of the online program is included in the institution's ongoing evaluation plan.

Adapted from Phipps and Merisotis (2000, pp 2-3).

Note: F-1 non-immigrant students are limited in online credits in course work (See U. S. Department of Homeland Security information on international students and scholars in the United States who hold F, J, and M visas (<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/overview>)).

#### References

Institute of Medicine. (2010). *The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Phipps, R., & Merisotis, J. (2000). *Quality on the line: Benchmarks for success in Internet-based distance education*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/mr/QualityOnTheLine.pdf>

Shelton, K. (2011) A Review of Paradigms for Evaluating the Quality of Online Education Programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 4(1), <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdl/spring141/shelton141.html>

Smith, T. C. (2005). Fifty-one competencies for online instruction. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 2(2), 1-18.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provided this link related to their recommended principles for electronic courses:

<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/pdf/2708.pdf?CFID=32415902&CFTOKEN=21026888>