



Reviewing Distance and Correspondence Education Programs

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Diversity and Innovation in Midwifery Education



MEAC accredits programs that incorporate various models of **course delivery**:

- classroom-based courses,
- distance education,
- correspondence courses, and
- hybrid models

All programs include **clinical training** which typically occurs in community-based midwifery practices and is always under the direct supervision of a qualified preceptor. Therefore, no MEAC school is *purely* distance or correspondence education.

Distance Education



- Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below 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**.
- The **technologies** may include
 1. the internet;
 2. one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
 3. audio conferencing or
 4. video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

Distance Education



Midwives College of Utah

All didactic courses are taught **on-line** and each course is taught by one instructor. Optional on-site student conferences are held three times/year and provide hands-on skills training and allow the student to spend time with other MCU students, instructors and midwives. Clinical experiences take place in midwifery practices across the U.S. and abroad. Student services are available on-line and by phone. The administrative offices are located in Utah.

Correspondence Education

- 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 the 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**.

Correspondence Education



National Midwifery Institute

Courses are organized in modules that students complete **independently** and return to the instructor for evaluation. The curriculum is **self-paced**. Clinical experiences take place in midwifery practices across the U.S. and abroad. Student support services are available on-line and by phone. Administrative offices are located in Vermont.

Hybrid Model



**Bastyr University
Department of Midwifery**

Courses are designed to include **both on-site classroom and on-line instruction**. Each course is taught by one instructor. Students are admitted in cohorts and typically progress through the program as a group. Clinical experiences take place in midwifery practices across the U.S. and abroad. Student support services are available on-line, by phone and in-person. The classroom and central administrative offices are located at Bastyr University in Washington State.

Reviewing Distance and Correspondence Education



Schools with distance, correspondence, or hybrid programs:

- Undergo the same **accreditation process** as those with only residential programs,
- Require roughly the same **timeframe** for the accreditation process,
- Must demonstrate **compliance with all MEAC Standards**, and
- Must demonstrate compliance with MEAC Benchmarks **specific to distance, correspondence, or hybrid models.**

I. Mission, Program Assessment, and Student Achievement



The purpose of the benchmarks in this section is to ensure that the institution has clearly articulated both a mission and program goals, and to ensure that the institution engages in the ongoing assessment of the achievement of its goals. Benchmarks also seek to ensure that the institution engages in the ongoing measurement of student achievement.

I | Benchmark A – Institution’s Mission

I | Benchmark B – Program Goals, Objectives, and Assessment

I | Benchmark C – Assessment of Student Achievement

There is no difference in criteria for schools with distance or correspondence courses

II. Curricula



Graduates of midwifery schools may practice anywhere in the world and work with many different populations. The purpose of the benchmarks in this section is to ensure the institution is training midwives who will be competent in all of the knowledge and skills identified in the *MEAC Curriculum Checklist of Essential Competencies*. That Checklist is informed by the International Confederation of Midwives Essential Competencies for basic midwifery practice, the NARM Comprehensive Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities Essential for Competent Midwifery Practice and the MANA Core Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice. Institutions must also ensure that students obtain the minimum clinical experiences required for certification by NARM.

- II | Benchmark A – Curricular Mapping
- II | Benchmark B – Learning Activities
- II | Benchmark C – Learning Assessment
- II | Benchmark D – Ongoing Curriculum Improvement
- II | Benchmark E – Degree-Granting Institutions

II. Curricula



ARC audits student and graduate files and interviews students and graduates to verify that:

- distance or correspondence students progress through the curriculum as described in the SER (II.A1);
- learning activities and learning resources are appropriate for distance or correspondence education courses (II.B1); and
- Assessment tools are appropriate for students in distance or correspondence programs (II.C1).

ARC audits curriculum files to verify that learning activities, learning resources, evaluation methods are appropriate for distance/correspondence education (II.B1+C1)

ARC considers whether the curriculum review methods are appropriate for distance/correspondence education.

Ask yourself:

Does the course design promote both faculty and student engagement?

Are the expectations for student assignment completion, grade policy, and faculty response are clearly stated in the course syllabus?

What opportunities and tools encourage student-to-student collaboration?

III. Faculty



The purpose of the benchmarks in this section is to assure that faculty is qualified and has the appropriate training and/or education necessary for each credential/degree level offered by the school. These benchmarks also address the rights and responsibilities of faculty, the required orientation of faculty, and the ongoing training and evaluation requirements of faculty.

III | Benchmark A – Qualifications and Hiring

III | Benchmark B – Orientation and Professional Development

III | Benchmark C – Evaluation and Supervision

III | Benchmark D – Rights and Responsibilities

III | Benchmark E – Degree-Granting Institutions

III. Faculty



ARC audits faculty files to verify that:

- the school clearly states expectations for online teaching;
- training occurs in the development and delivery of distance/correspondence courses (III.B2);
- the school provides assistance and technical support to faculty for the development and delivery of distance/correspondence courses (III.B3);
- The performance of faculty delivering distance/correspondence courses is evaluated (III.C1+C2)

ARC interviews students and graduates to verify that:

- faculty is adequate to provide instruction and meet individual learning needs in distance or correspondence education courses (III.C1+C2)

Ask yourself:

Do job descriptions or other terms of employment establish clear standards for faculty engagement and expectations around on-line teaching?

Are faculty are provided on-going professional development related to online teaching and learning?

Are workshops are provided to make faculty aware of emerging technologies and the selection and use of these tools?

Do course evaluations collect feedback on effectiveness of instruction, instructor's availability, etc.?

Is student feedback addressed in faculty performance evaluation?

IV. Facilities, Equipment, Supplies, and Other Resources



The purpose of the benchmarks in this standard is to assure that all the classroom facilities, clinical sites, learning resources, administrative offices and distance education infrastructure are adequate to meet the needs of students and accomplish the goals and objectives of the program.

IV | Benchmark A – Classroom Facilities

IV | Benchmark B – Library and Learning Resources

IV | Benchmark C – Clinical Sites

IV | Benchmark D – Administrative Office Facilities and
Distance Education Infrastructure

IV | Benchmark E – Degree-Granting Institutions

IV. Facilities, Equipment, Supplies, and Other Resources

ARC **interviews students and graduates** to verify that they have access to library materials when they are not regularly on site (IV.B1, B2, B3, B4).

ARC **interviews faculty** to verify that they are supported in the development and use of technology for teaching (IV.B1, D6).

ARC **examines distance/correspondence education courses** and **observes** student-faculty interactions (IV.A1).

ARC examines **technology and technical support** available to students and faculty (IV.A1, D1-D6).

Ask yourself:

ARC members must be oriented to the school's on-line systems and given temporary access to on-line courses where they can observe how course delivery is working.

Does the institution provide guidance to students and faculty in the use of all forms of technology used for course delivery?

Do students and faculty have reliable and regular access to technical support to problem, to solve glitches in course software, email communications or other services or hardware necessary to participate in the course?

V. Governance, Financial Management, and Administrative Capacity (Institutions)



The benchmarks in this standard are designed to assess the financial and overall stability of the **institution**, ensure that the proper financial accountability measures are in place, and demonstrate that the institution has adequate administrative staff to operate effectively and fulfill its obligations to students.

- V | Benchmark A – Governance
- V | Benchmark B – Financial Management
- V | Benchmark C – Administrative Capacity
- V | Benchmark D – External Regulation

V. Governance, Financial Management, and Administrative Capacity (Institutions)

ARC will **interview students and graduates** to verify that they are provided with receipts and have access to their ledgers (V.B1)

ARC will **audit administrative staff files** to verify that job descriptions and employment contracts contain references to any specific responsibilities regarding distance/ correspondence education (V.C2)

ARC will **confirm** that the institution is legally authorized under state law(s) to provide distance/correspondence education in all states where its students reside (V.D1)

Ask yourself:

Who has overall responsibility for developing and/or evaluating distance education curriculum?

Who provides student support services for distance education students, e.g. academic, personal, or career counseling?

Who maintains the technology infrastructure for the distance education program?

In what states do the program's students reside? Has the program obtained authorization from each of those states to educate those students?

V. Governance, Financial Management, and Administrative Capacity (Programs)



The benchmarks in this standard are designed to assess that the **program** has institutional support, ensure that representatives of the program leadership participate in institutional governance and to ensure that the program has adequate administrative staff to operate effectively and fulfill its obligations to students.

- V | Benchmark A – Governance
- V | Benchmark B – Financial Management
- V | Benchmark C – Administrative Capacity
- V | Benchmark D – External Regulation

V. Governance, Financial Management, and Administrative Capacity (Programs)

ARC will **interview administration** to verify that the program has adequate institutional support to run distance/correspondence education programs (V.B1)

ARC will **audit administrative staff files** to verify that job descriptions and employment contracts contain references to any specific responsibilities regarding distance/ correspondence education (V.C2)

ARC will **confirm** that the program is legally authorized under state law(s) to provide distance/correspondence education in all states where it has a presence. (V.D2)

Ask yourself:

How does the institution support the program in developing, delivering, and supporting distance/correspondence courses?

Who has overall responsibility for developing and/or evaluating distance education curriculum?

Who provides student support services for distance education students, e.g. academic, personal, or career counseling?

Who maintains the technology infrastructure for the distance education program?

In what states does the program have a physical presence? Has the program obtained authorization from each of those states to educate those students?

VI. Student Services



The purpose of the benchmarks in this standard is to ensure that the institution offers academic advising and other student support services that facilitate and encourage academic success.

VI | Benchmark A – Student Support Services

VI | Benchmark B – Technical Support for Distance Education Students

VI. Student Services



ARC will **interview students and graduates** to verify that:

- student services are provided to distance/correspondence students, as required (VI.A1);
- Students have access to technical support (VI.B1);

Ask yourself:

Does new student orientation includes instruction in appropriate ways of enlisting help from the program when enrolled in distance education courses?

Are students aware of --and have access to --advising and tutoring when needed?

VII. Student Affairs



The purpose of the benchmarks in this standard is to ensure that the students' rights and responsibilities are protected in policies and procedures dealing with student admission, enrollment, advertising and public disclosure, definitions of satisfactory academic progress, student rights, transcripts, and tuition payment and refunds. The benchmarks also establish what information must be made available to the public, including to prospective students.

VII | Benchmark A – Student Admission and Enrollment

VII | Benchmark B – Disclosure to the Public, Including Prospective Students

VII | Benchmark C – Satisfactory Academic Progress

VII | Benchmark D – Student Rights, Transcripts and Refunds

VII. Student Affairs



ARC will **review all advertising, information and promotional materials** regarding the distance education component of the program (VII.B1, B2)

ARC will **audit admissions files** to verify that policies and procedures are followed for the selection of students planning to enroll in distance education courses.

ARC will **audit student files** and other records to verify that:

- policies and procedures are followed for distance education students (VII.A2, C1).
- specifics regarding the distance education program are included (VII.A2, C1).

ARC will **interview students and graduates** to verify that distance/correspondence students are provided with opportunities to participate in planning and evaluation (VII.D2)

Ask yourself:

Does advertising accurately state completion rates?

Does advertising accurately state how long it generally takes students in flexible or self-paced programs to complete the requirements?

Do materials clearly explain the minimum technology requirements (skills, equipment, internet access)?

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VIII. Measures of Program Length



The purpose of the benchmarks in this standard is to ensure that institutions accurately describe the length of the program and, if credits are awarded, that credits are calculated using the current U.S. Department of Education formula.

VIII | Benchmark A – Time Spent in Didactic and Clinical Learning

VIII | Benchmark B – Awarding Academic Credits

VIII | Benchmark C – Degree-Granting Institutions

VIII. Measures of Program Length

ARC will **audit distance education courses** to verify that credit hour assignments are reasonable based on the formula described by the school (VIII.B1).

ARC will **audit student and graduate files** to verify that the policies and procedures for the minimum and maximum time for completing the program are followed by distance/correspondence students (VIII.A1)

Ask yourself:

Does the school use a standard measurement for awarding credits?

Does the school actually follow its policies and procedures for awarding the credits?

IX. Complaints and Grievance



The purpose of the benchmarks in this section is to ensure that institutions have policies and procedures in place that provide students, faculty, and staff with a clear way to lodge complaints or grievances. The benchmarks also ensure that the proper documentation of grievances is retained and made available to MEAC officials when requested. This standard also requires that students are informed of the proper channel to file a complaint with MEAC or other regulatory bodies.

IX | Benchmark A – Institutional Grievance Policy

IX | Benchmark B – Retention of Grievance Records

IX | Benchmark C – External Grievance Mechanisms

IX. Complaints and Grievance



ARC will **audit complaint/grievance records** to determine that policies and procedures are in place and applied consistently for distance education students (IX.A3)

ARC will **interview students and graduates** to verify that distance/correspondence students are aware of the complaint/grievance policies and procedures (IX.A1)

Ask yourself:

Have any complaints or grievances been received since the SER?

If so, has the school handled them in a manner consistent with its policies?

X. Compliance with the Institution's Responsibilities Under Title IV of the Higher Education Act



The purpose of the benchmarks in this standard is to ensure that institutions participating in Title IV financial aid programs have adequate administrative capacity, trained personnel, and policies and procedures to fulfill their government obligations.

X | Benchmark A – Compliance with US Department of Education Regulations

X | Benchmark B – Title IV Administration

X | Benchmark C – Currency in Title IV Regulations

X. Compliance with the Institution's Responsibilities Under Title IV of the Higher Education Act

ARC will **verify that the institution** has a designated employee responsible for the administration of student financial aid (X.B2)

ARC will **interview administrative staff** responsible for financial aid to verify that they have been trained and there are plans for on-going training (X.C1)

ARC will **interview students and graduates** to verify that distance/correspondence students have received information about their financial aid options and rights and responsibilities (X.B5)

Ask yourself:

Who is the person responsible for administering the financial aid program?

Has that person been adequately trained?

What is the plan for ongoing training?

Conclusion

Schools with distance, correspondence, or hybrid programs must demonstrate compliance with **all of MEAC's benchmarks** for **all of the students** – both those who are on site and those who are separated from their instructors.