

**Principles of Good Practice
for Higher Education Institutions
Providing Voluntary Distance Education Programs
to Members of the U.S. Armed Forces & their Families**

These Principles were developed to ensure that distance higher education courses and programs for servicemembers, their families, and the Department of Defense (DOD) education community are of high quality and readily accessible. The Principles are founded on best practices in distance higher education and tailored to the unique needs of the military community. The Principles define parameters of excellence; enhance the legitimacy and worth of distance education; and foster dialogue to strengthen and improve the quality of these programs and services. The Principles contribute to the continuous improvement of the military voluntary education program by helping to establish benchmarks of quality. Achievement of these Principles will result in an institution earning status as a DOD Preferred Provider of Distance Education and enable military members to make an informed choice among distance education institutions.

For each of the following Principles, institutions should evaluate their distance education programs and services against the Subprinciples provided and be prepared to provide documentation to support their responses to each Subprinciple question.

Principle 1. Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The delivery of distance education programs is consistent with the institution’s mission statement and statement of goals and objectives (MGOs). The institution ensures that quality assurance in distance education programs is an integral part of its MGOs. The MGOs are widely promulgated, visible, and undergo periodic review.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S1.1 Does the institution have a current mission statement and a statement of goals and objectives (MGOs)?			
S1.2 Does the institution have provisions for the periodic review and revision of its MGOs?			
S1.3 Does the institution ensure that quality assurance in distance education programs is an integral part of its MGOs?			
S1.4 Are the institution’s MGOs widely promulgated and readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders?			
S1.5 Are the institution’s MGOs included in the institution’s catalog and program materials?			
Institution meets Principle 1 overall:			

Principle 2. Accountability to Stakeholders

The institution demonstrates its accountability to stakeholders by openly sharing aggregate learning assessment results, quality indicators, and academic program reviews of its distance education courses and programs.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S2.1 Does the institution share aggregate learning assessment results and other quality indicators, including academic program reviews, with stakeholders?			
S2.2 Does the institution comply with previously articulated standing and <i>ad hoc</i> reporting requirements of stakeholders?			
Institution meets Principle 2 overall:			

Principle 3. Responsiveness and Flexibility

The institution demonstrates responsiveness and flexibility toward servicemembers with respect to programmatic, administrative, and academic processes.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S3.1 Does the institution have flexible policies in the areas of admissions (subject to its accreditation and state licensing guidelines), credit transfer (to include credit by exam and military training experience) and academic residency requirements to meet the unique needs of military students?			
S3.2 Does the institution have flexible alternative procedures for servicemembers in the areas of course scheduling and format, as well as course registration, course withdrawals/extensions, continuous enrollment requirements, incomplete grades, and refunds, especially during periods of increased deployment?			
S3.3 Does the institution have clear policies and procedures that encourage faculty to be responsive to the demands of military life (i.e. extra duty, TDYs, deployments)?			
Institution meets Principle 3 overall:			

Principle 4. Curriculum Development and Revision

The institution has established processes to accomplish its curriculum development, revision, and quality assurance that are grounded in instructional design principles and include periodic program (internal and external) and course reviews. The institution directly reviews and is responsible for the currency and quality of all outsourced program components.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S4.1 Does the institution conduct academic program reviews (including external reviewers) at least every five years?			
S4.2 Does the institution conduct course reviews at least every two years to ensure currency and rigor of the academic content?			
S4.3 Are the institution's course development models grounded in instructional design principles?			
S4.4 Does the institution have a curriculum quality life cycle that includes but is not limited to the following (provide separate answers for each item): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Faculty and academic administrators initiate curriculum development based on attested need, institutional mission/goals/objectives, and feedback from students, faculty, institutional researchers and stakeholders; II. Course developers (faculty and instructional designers) develop/revise the curriculum content; III. Course developers conduct peer review, consultation with discipline advisory bodies where appropriate, and carry out other quality control measures; IV. After the new/revised course is launched, feedback from students, faculty, and institutional researchers and stakeholders – through outcomes assessment and other measures – is obtained and reported to course developers; V. Course developers use feedback to model subsequent development and revision efforts. 			
S4.5 Does the institution conduct research into distance teaching and learning with the goal of continuous quality improvement?			
S4.6 Does the institution standardize the content, course descriptions, learning objectives, and learning outcomes of its courses and programs in order to facilitate quality assurance and the assessment of student learning regardless of delivery method?			
S4.7 Does the institution directly review the currency and quality of all outsourced program components on an annual basis and is it directly responsible for such quality?			
Institution meets Principle 4 overall:			

Principle 5. Curriculum Delivery

The institution ensures that the content and quality of its courses and programs are the same regardless of delivery method. The distance delivery model(s), course materials, and technology are appropriate to the content and needs of the student, and do not create barriers to learning.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S5.1 When the institution employs multiple delivery methods, are the learning objectives for courses and programs the same independent of delivery method?			
S5.2 Do the course delivery model and course materials facilitate delivery of the course content such that students may reasonably be expected to achieve the learning objectives?			
S5.3 Does the technology used to deliver distance education courses and programs fit the content?			
S5.4 Do the technology, course delivery model, and course materials meet the needs of the students without creating barriers to student learning?			
S5.5 Is the technology, including software, necessary for participation in the course readily available to students?			
Institution meets Principle 5 overall			

Principle 6. Interaction and Student Engagement

The institution ensures that distance education courses are designed to maximize interaction between the faculty and students, among students, and between students and the course content to encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and mastery through student engagement in the learning process. Course models with little or no opportunity for interaction will only be deployed to the military community as requested by the Department of Defense.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S6.1 Does the institution align the size of distance education sections with the course level and content in order to encourage and facilitate interaction between/among (provide separate answers for each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student and faculty? • Student and student? • Student and content? 			
S6.2 Does the institution use a course design that promotes student-faculty, student-student, and student-content interaction appropriate to the discipline, the level of the course, and the needs of the students?			
S6.3 Does the institution deploy course models with little or no opportunity for interaction to the military community only as requested by the Department of Defense?			
S6.4 Does the institution have multiple communication options, including both asynchronous and synchronous?			
S6.5 For online courses and programs, does the institution emphasize the use of the web as a learning resource as well as a delivery medium?			
S6.6 For non-web based distance courses, does the institution provide			

learning resources that facilitate the student's interaction with the material and achievement of the objectives?			
S6.7 Does the institution emphasize the use of frequent and varied assignments, with particular emphasis on effective written and interpersonal communication skills?			
S6.8 Does the institution use assignments <u>at the appropriate course level</u> that require (provide separate answers for each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigative reading; • critical thinking; • analysis/synthesis, and evaluation; • problem solving; • mastery of subject-specific language and concepts; • hands-on activities? 			
Institution meets Principle 6 overall			

Principle 7. Faculty Qualifications and Training

The institution ensures that all faculty members engaged in distance delivery meet the same academic qualifications and standards in accordance with the institution's accrediting and oversight bodies. The institution trains, certifies, and supports faculty who teach distance education courses in the appropriate use of distance pedagogy, delivery methods, instructional technology, and the unique needs of servicemembers and their families. "Certifies" means a process that confirms a faculty member has completed required training and successfully achieved its learning objectives.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S7.1 Does the institution ensure faculty involved in distance education meet the same academic qualifications as other faculty at the institution?			
S7.2 Does the institution train and certify all faculty who teach distance education courses in the appropriate use of various distance education delivery media?			
S7.3 Does the institution assign responsibility for the content, presentation, management, and assessment of courses and programs only to individuals with appropriate academic qualifications?			
S7.4 Does the institution provide mandatory training to ensure that those responsible for program instruction and development are proficient in the pedagogical use of the instructional technologies, including potential changes in course design and management?			
S7.5 Does the institution provide mandatory training that emphasizes and fosters the development of (provide separate answers for each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a student-centered learning experience; • an interactive online classroom (when online is the mode of delivery), including faculty-student, student-student, and student-content interaction; 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a habit of providing timely feedback to include critique of assignments, return of grades, and student communications; • faculty awareness of and responsiveness to the demands unique to military students - e.g. extra duty, TDY, deployments; • best practices in teaching and learning at a distance? 			
S7.6 Does the institution provide new faculty with training and assistance before a course begins and throughout the duration of the course?			
S7.7 Does the institution have an ongoing training program to support its faculty in developing and maintaining their distance teaching skills?			
S7.8 Does the institution ensure that faculty receive proper and timely training when technology for electronically delivered or electronically enhanced courses is changed or improved?			
S7.9 Does the institution assist its faculty and staff in understanding (provide separate answers for each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the purpose of the distance education technology and appropriate user etiquette; • the knowledge and skills to manipulate and interact with the technology; • the objectives and outcomes that the technology is intended to support? 			
Institution meets Principle 7 overall			

Principle 8. Faculty Evaluation

The institution has clear, consistent policies, measures, and procedures to evaluate the performance and needs of faculty members who teach distance education courses.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S8.1 Does the institution have a system for evaluating and tracking the teaching performance of its faculty?			
S8.2 Does the institution review the results of student and course evaluations and communicate those results to the respective faculty members as part of the performance evaluation process?			
S8.3 Does the institution evaluate faculty on the timeliness and quality of their responses to distance students, synchronously or asynchronously, whichever is appropriate?			
S8.4 Does the institution have clear and consistent policies, procedures, and expectations to ensure that faculty who teach distance education courses are not disadvantaged in terms of evaluation, promotion, and employment opportunities?			
Institution meets Principle 8 overall			

Principle 9. Student Evaluation

The institution has clearly articulated measures in place to evaluate in a timely manner the performance of distance students. The institution is able to verify student identity in at least one significant assignment or examination used to calculate the final course grade. The institution publishes a grading policy that includes instructions for issuance and completion of incomplete grades.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S9.1 Does the institution have a clearly stated grading policy to govern the assessment of student learning in distance education courses?			
S9.2 Does the institution's grading policy set appropriate and clear expectations for learner interactivity and faculty feedback in the distance education courses, as well as how that interactivity will be assessed?			
S9.3 Does the institution provide distance students with a syllabus that includes course description, learning objectives, grading policy, a list of texts, and other course content as appropriate?			
S9.4. Does the institution have policies on the issuance and completion of "Incomplete" grades and provide this information to its distance students?			
S9.5 Is the institution able to verify student identity in at least one significant assignment or examination used to calculate the final course grade?			
S9.6 Does the institution evaluate new student preparedness in (provide separate answers for each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing (including English proficiency for speakers of other languages)? • quantitative skills? 			
S9.7 Does the institution ensure that only students who are academically prepared may register for upper-division and advanced coursework in all disciplines?			
Institution meets Principle 9 overall			

Principle 10. Learning Outcomes Assessment

The institution articulates student learning outcomes independent of delivery method, has a systematic and ongoing process for assessing student learning, and provides measurable evidence that the results are used to improve programs, curricula, instruction, faculty development, and services.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S10.1 Does the institution have a systematic and ongoing process for assessing student learning at the course, program, and institutional levels?			
S10.2 Are learning outcomes the same for all sections of a course			

regardless of delivery method?			
S10.3 Does the institution regularly assess student learning, use the information obtained to inform the curriculum quality life cycle [see Principle 4], and share the results of this process with stakeholders as appropriate?			
S10.4 Does the institution use measurements of student learning that are reliable and valid?			
S10.5 Does the institution ensure that student learning outcomes inform faculty development efforts?			
S10.6 Does the institution periodically capture student learning data specific to military students and use such results to improve programs and services for military students?			
Institution meets Principle 10 overall			

Principle 11. Institutional Integrity

The institution is accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency, and is a member of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). The institution complies with the notification requirements of its accrediting agency whenever major changes (as determined by that agency) are made to the institution's distance education programs. The institution maintains responsibility for the performance of faculty and program support staff supplied by consortia partners or outsourced to other organizations, including contractors who may not be accredited.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S11.1 Is the institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education?			
S11.2 Is the institution a member of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)?			
S11.3 Does the institution have policies and procedures for ensuring academic integrity on the part of distance students and faculty?			
S11.4 Does the institution maintain responsibility for the performance of faculty and program support staff supplied by consortia partners or outsourced to other organizations, including contractors who may not be accredited?			
S11.5 Are the institution's own faculty or qualified academic staff involved in the development, review, and quality assurance of curriculum delivered by consortia partners or outsourced to other organizations including contractors who may not be accredited?			
S11.6 Does the institution create, promulgate, and adhere to academic policies designed to ensure a quality learning experience for its students?			
S11.7 Does the institution have policies that address intellectual property and copyright?			
S11.8 Does the institution create and adhere to an environment that is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?			
S11.9 Do the institution's programs and services comply with Section 508			

of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?			
Institution meets Principle 11 overall			

Principle 12. Disclosure

The institution discloses throughout its marketing and communications, accurate, truthful information about its mission, accreditation, courses and programs, services, policies, transfer credit, tuition and fees, use of recruitment incentives or commissions in its recruitment processes, and other factors important to prospective and current students and other stakeholders.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S12.1 Are the institution's marketing or other public information and disclosures accurate, truthful and consistent?			
S12.2 Does the institution explain how the students' prior academic experiences will be evaluated and how their academic standing will be determined prior to admission to the program?			
S12.3 Does the institution disclose to students, upon admission to the program, graduation requirements and any summative or capstone assessments required at the conclusion of the program?			
S12.4 Does the institution clearly articulate those learning outcomes that identify knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for both admission to and graduation from the program?			
S12.5 Does the institution clearly identify the extent to which all or part of a program is delivered by a third party?			
S12.6 Does the institution disclose the use of recruitment incentives/commissions within the student recruitment process?			
S12.7 Does the institution notify the appropriate accreditation agencies whenever major changes as defined by the agency are made to its distance education program?			
S12.8 Does the institution accurately and truthfully disclose all course costs, including tuition, fees, student incentives, necessary/required technology, late payment penalties, and refund policies for which the student or third-party payer will be responsible?			
S12.9 Does the institution accurately and truthfully disclose financing plans and financial aid programs to include loan application and other reimbursable forms of financial assistance?			
Institution meets Principle 12 overall:			

Principle 13. Services

The institution makes available 24/7/365 a full array of static and dynamic academic and administrative student services, independent of delivery method and appropriate to distance students' needs. The institution ensures that faculty and staff respond in a timely manner to student questions and concerns, both academic and administrative.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
<p>S13.1 Does the institution provide at a distance <i>static</i> student services designed in such a way that the student may successfully use them largely on his/her own? These include but are not limited to (provide separate answers for each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University catalogs • Course schedules • Policy manuals • Information about/orientation to the institution and the learning management system • Information about/orientation to library research, databases, and writing tools • Minimum technical requirements for participation by delivery mode and (where appropriate) by course and program • An orientation module or course to help students gauge their readiness for distance learning • A means for students to view their financial account status • A means for students to view their course grades/academic records 			
<p>S13.2 Does the institution provide at a distance <i>dynamic</i> student services that include but are not limited to (provide separate answers for each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application for admission • Academic advising • Registration • Secure Payment services • Technical support • Textbook ordering and delivery • Digital or other remote-access library services, • Qualified personnel to facilitate library reference services, research, and databases • Information about how students can satisfy testing requirements at a distance • Degree audits that allow the student to evaluate their current and potential credit in different programs offered by the school • Information and/or resources for career counseling • Application for graduation • Hotline for unanswered questions (toll-free number/email) 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and/or resources for academic tutoring or remediation for key learning areas (math, writing) 			
S13.3 Does the institution ensure that staff respond in a timely manner to student course and program related questions and concerns?			
S13.4 Does the institution have standards and processes to ensure timely response to questions from students and military education administrators related to academic affairs, technology, finance, and other services?			
S13.5 Does the institution have a policy and/or procedures in place for receiving, evaluating and resolving student grievances?			
S13.6 Does the institution provide the military education administrators at the distance students' support installation pertinent institution contact information, program materials, course grades, and other support as appropriate?			
S13.7 Does the institution provide graduation information to distance students and ensure that students able to participate in an institution commencement ceremony are afforded the opportunity?			
S13.8 Does the institution provide distance students the full range of services, independent of holidays and time zones, through a variety of media (e.g. web-based, telephone, email, live chat, face-to-face)?			
S13.9 Does the institution provide distance students an environment of connectedness and inclusion to the institution, faculty, and other students?			
S13.10 Does the institution ensure that timely delivery of textbooks and other required course materials is accomplished regardless of the distance student's location?			
Institution meets Principle 13 overall			

Principle 14. Resources

The institution provides the necessary resources to accommodate demand and to ensure distance education students receive a quality education experience. Distance education courses and concomitant student and faculty services are offered through reliable, efficient, and readily available technologies. The institution has sufficient financial resources to ensure that students can complete the educational program to which they were admitted.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S14.1 Can the institution demonstrate through past fiscal performance and current budget reports that it has the financial resources necessary to support quality distance education and is allocating these resources to distance education programs?			
S14.2 Are the institution's distance education delivery systems, faculty recruitment systems, and student services systems sufficiently scalable to accommodate significant increases in demand without sacrificing quality?			
S14.3 Can the institution demonstrate through its goals and objectives that appropriate resources are allocated to quality assurance efforts in the			

delivery of distance education to students?			
<p>S14.4 Does the institution make an investment of resources and effort in the support and professional development of faculty and staff involved in distance learning and provide resources that include (provide separate answers for each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance education, instructional technology, and instructional design experts who assist faculty with the development and delivery of distance courses; • For online programs, a fully operational “Electronic Classroom” environment; • Digital library access; • Human and other resources necessary to ensure delivery of static and dynamic services for distance students and faculty. • New technology as it becomes readily available. 			
S14.5 Does the institution have a faculty workload policy that addresses the maximum number of courses a faculty member can teach in a given term?			
S14.6 Does the institution ensure that the technology infrastructure is continuously updated and improved to meet the needs of both learners and learning facilitators for presenting information, interacting within the learning community, and gaining access to learning resources?			
S14.7 During technology upgrades or transitions, does the institution deploy contingency/transition plans to ensure that students are not disadvantaged?			
S14.8 Does the institution deploy transition/contingency plans to respond to major changes in military personnel deployment and other significant events?			
S14.9 Does the institution ensure that the technical infrastructure is robust, secure, and reliable?			
S14.10 Does the institution employ reliable information assurance measures to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student records and personal information?			
S14.11 If the institution uses multiple delivery systems or course models, does it have mechanisms in place to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by different technical nomenclature, protocol, and requirements in different courses?			
Institution meets Principle 14 overall			

Principle 15. Institutional Outcomes

The institution regularly measures and publishes the retention, graduation, course completion, and withdrawal rates of its students, including those taking courses via distance education (the rates of such students to be disaggregated and reported separately from the overall student population). The formulae used to calculate these rates are

defined and readily available. The institution regularly assesses the satisfaction of its students and alumni and the job-related outcomes of its graduates.

Subprinciples

	Yes	No	N/A
S15.1 Does the institution regularly assess and disclose the retention rates of its military students using a clearly defined, cohort-based process?			
S15.2 Does the institution report annual updates of the retention rates for each defined cohort? Are cohorts followed for at least six years?			
S15.3 Does the institution assess the graduation rate of its military students using a process that is cohort-based and computed annually over six years? Is the graduation rate calculated on the basis of the same cohort(s) used in tracking retention?			
S15.4 Does the institution regularly assess the distance learning course withdrawal rate of its military students? [NB: The course withdrawal rate should be defined as the total number of course withdrawals (i.e., the total number of course withdrawals initiated by military students according to the institution's policies) divided by the total number of grades (A, B, C, D, P, F, I, and W) the military students received in all courses. This rate should be term-based.]			
S15.5 Does the institution regularly measure the satisfaction of its students and alumni? [NB: The institution may use an instrument of its choice, but it will include at a minimum satisfaction with the academic and student services provided to the student.]			
S15.6 Does the institution regularly measure job-related outcomes of its graduates? [NB: The institution may use an instrument of its choice, but it will include at a minimum annual salary, employment rate, and relationship of job to the program completed.]			
Institution meets Principle 15 overall			

DEFINITIONS

Academic Integrity: The adherence to a set of principles that specify honest and ethical behavior in all academic activities and endeavors including teaching/learning and research.

Academic Program Review: A formal evaluation, by both internal and external subject matter experts, of the content of an academic program.

Certification (of faculty): A process that confirms a faculty member has completed required training and successfully achieved its learning objectives.

Cohort-Based: An institutional research model that follows a specific group of target subjects (the cohort) over time. [NB: This does not imply that the students follow a cohort-based program; rather that the target group of students is captured at a point in time (typically, at time of first registration with the institution) and then followed for purposes of measuring retention and graduation rates.]

Curriculum Quality Life Cycle: The sequence of events in which results from outcomes assessment and other measures are used to revise existing curricula with the goal of improving them.

Delivery Method: The means by which students and instructor interact with each other and with the content of a course. In distance education the delivery method typically involves the use of one or more information/communication technologies.

Delivery Model: The underlying communication structure within a course. A broadcast model makes use of one-way communication, while an interactive model uses two-way communication between instructor and students.

Deployment: A planned movement of military personnel from their home base to a designated base of operations for a specified period of time.

Dynamic Student Services: Student services that require interaction with a university staff member, a website application, or a telecommunications system.

Electronic Classroom: A technological application or package of applications that provides students and instructors with access to course materials and communication modalities.

Leave of Absence: An enrollment mechanism that allows students in programs requiring continuous enrollment to take no courses during a given academic term or specified period of time.

Scalable: Capable of being increased in size, breadth, or magnitude without significant change to fundamental structure, characteristics, quality, or cost.

Stakeholders: An institution's stakeholders may include but are not limited to:

- DOD Community Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges
- State and federal oversight bodies
- Accrediting agencies
- Legislators
- Tax-payers
- The U.S. Armed Forces
- The U.S. Department of Defense
- Commanding officers
- Education services personnel
- Other members of the military education community

Static Student Services: Student services made available in such a way that a student may successfully use them largely on his/her own.

Student-Centered Learning: A pedagogical approach in which the instructor facilitates student learning through individual and group activities, problem solving exercises, and skills-oriented activities.

TDY (Temporary Duty): A military assignment, generally 179 days or less in duration, to a duty station away from a servicemember's normal duty location.