Distance Education Program Effectiveness

REPORTING GUIDELINES

February 2025

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
Office of Institutional Effectiveness
& Evaluation

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About *Distance Education Program Effectiveness*

Distance Education (DE) programs are those where most of the instruction occurs through distance education technology, allowing students and instructors to be in different locations. Like traditional face-to-face programs, DE programs must document assessment of learning. DE programs are also required to document their systematic internal review of overall effectiveness given their approved mode of delivery. The purpose of this documentation is NOT to provide justification of the DE program; it is simply to provide evidence that the program takes into special consideration how mode of delivery might impact student learning and experience.

DE program effectiveness information is reported annually in HelioCampus. Program learning outcomes (PLO) assessment is documented in the *Academic Program Assessment* form, while overall DE program effectiveness, which may include PLO assessment, is documented in the *Distance Education Program Effectiveness* form.

This manual is a detailed guide for documenting the Distance Education Program Effectiveness process. For guidelines on program learning outcomes assessment, refer to the *Academic Program Assessment Guidelines* available on the OIEE website.

Reporting Framework

As an institutional member of the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), Texas A&M University uses the OLC's globally recognized Quality Scorecards as a framework for examining effectiveness and equitability of DE programs with traditional programs. As such, programs are asked to identify sources of data relating to (1) student learning and (2) the overall student experience within the DE program. DE programs are also strongly encouraged to utilize Student Course Evaluation data.

Reporting Workflow

Roles

Distance Education Program Effectiveness forms follow a 7-step workflow over the course of an academic year cycle. Individuals in the following roles participate at one or various points in the workflow:

- **Program Coordinators:** Faculty/instructors responsible for documenting and submitting Sources of Data, Findings, and Use of Results.
- **College DE Liaisons:** Appointees who work and are familiar with DE programs in their respective school/college. They provide internal feedback on Sources of Data and

Findings/Use of Results in the report forms. This role was introduced into the workflow as of the AY2025-26 reporting cycle.

- **OIEE:** Staff in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation. Administrative office responsible for providing support to those in the roles defined above as they participate in the annual DE Program Effectiveness process. OIEE staff are responsible for managing the assessment platform (HelioCampus) and providing final comments on completed DE Effectiveness reports.

Workflow Steps & Timeline

The table below shows each workflow step*, the role that workflow step is assigned to in HelioCampus, and (generally) the due date for submitting the form to the next workflow step. Specific due dates for active *DE Program Effectiveness* cycles can be found on the OIEE website (https://assessment.tamu.edu).

Workflow Step	Step Name	Assigned Role	Submission Due Date
Step 1	Sources of Data	Program Coordinator	Late April
Step 2	Internal Feedback	College DE Liaison	Late May
Step 3	Findings & Use of Results	Program Coordinator	Mid-October
Step 4	Internal Feedback	College DE Liaison	November
Step 5	Finalize Report	Program Coordinator	Early December
Step 6	OIEE Comments	OIEE	Late January
Step 7	Acknowledge Comments	Program Coordinator	Early February

*This workflow configuration is specific to the *25-26 Distance Education Program Effectiveness* forms. The *24-25 Distance Education Program Effectiveness* forms follow the old workflow, which can be found here.

Planning Stage: Sources of Data

! PLEASE NOTE: The documentation requirements outlined in this manual apply to both the *24-25* and *25-26 Distance Education Program Effectiveness* forms. However, the manual itself reflects the most recent version and includes prompts from the *25-26* forms specifically.

In this initial stage of documentation (submitted annually in the Spring semester), DE program coordinators are prompted to document the following:

1. *Will there be students enrolled in the DE program in the upcoming academic year?*

   Program Coordinator selects **Yes, No,** or **Unsure. "**Unsure" might be indicated if the program has not yet enrolled students or made admissions decisions for the upcoming academic year.

2. *Description of Data Sources*

   DE programs identify and describe at least two (2) sources of data which the program intends to review before the end of the reporting cycle. Ideally, the identified data sources will help the program evaluate its effectiveness, considering its delivery method, and should allow for comparison to traditional program(s)/offering(s). The program should prioritize sources of data that will provide representative information about student learning and the student experience.

Planning Stage Requirements

1. **Learning Outcomes:** One (1) data source must involve assessment of student learning via direct measures.
2. **Student Experience:** One (1) data source must be related to some aspect of student experience in the DE program.
3. **Comparison to traditional program/offering:** Program coordinators must identify at least one traditional program/offering for comparison purposes.

Example Data Sources

More detailed information about some of the following data sources can be found here.

Learning Outcomes Assessment

- Program Learning Outcomes (PLO) Assessment. Describe the PLO(s) and the direct measures used to assess the PLO(s), as outlined in the Academic Program Assessment report.
- Course Learning Outcomes. Describe how learning outcome(s) will be assessed in key courses, particularly if the same assignments or assessments are used across modalities.

Student Experience

- Student Course Evaluations (SCEs). DE programs with courses offered in multiple modalities may compare results on standardized SCE items. For fully online programs, SCE items focused specifically on the online nature of courses are particularly important to review.
- Approved Surveys. As an example, graduation survey responses can be compared to responses from students in traditional programs. Key areas of interest may include:
    - Use of academic and student support services.
    - Contribution of the program to developing necessary competencies/skills.
    - Perceptions of preparation for the job marking.
    - Overall program quality and academic experience.
- Student success indicators, such as:
    - Persistence
    - Retention
    - Graduation rates
    - Time to graduation

Comparison to Traditional Programs

Distance Education programs are required to identify traditional program(s)/offering(s) from which learning outcome and student experience data will be compared. For example, comparisons might be made between:

- The DE program and a comparable traditional program, such as
    - A face-to-face version of the same program.
    - A face-to-face program offered in the department or college at the same credential level [e.g., Aerospace Engineering MEng (DE) & Aerospace Engineering MS (FTF); Safety Engineering MS (DE) & Chemical Engineering (FTF)].
- Sections of key courses offered in online and face-to-face modalities.

Setting Targets

Setting targets for each source of data is *optional* though strongly encouraged. If PLO assessment data will be used, OIEE recommends including targets from the annual *Academic Program Assessment* report documentation which are available to Program Coordinators in their HelioCampus portal. Targets can be included in the form field where the data source is described.

Do & Don't: How to Describe Sources of Data

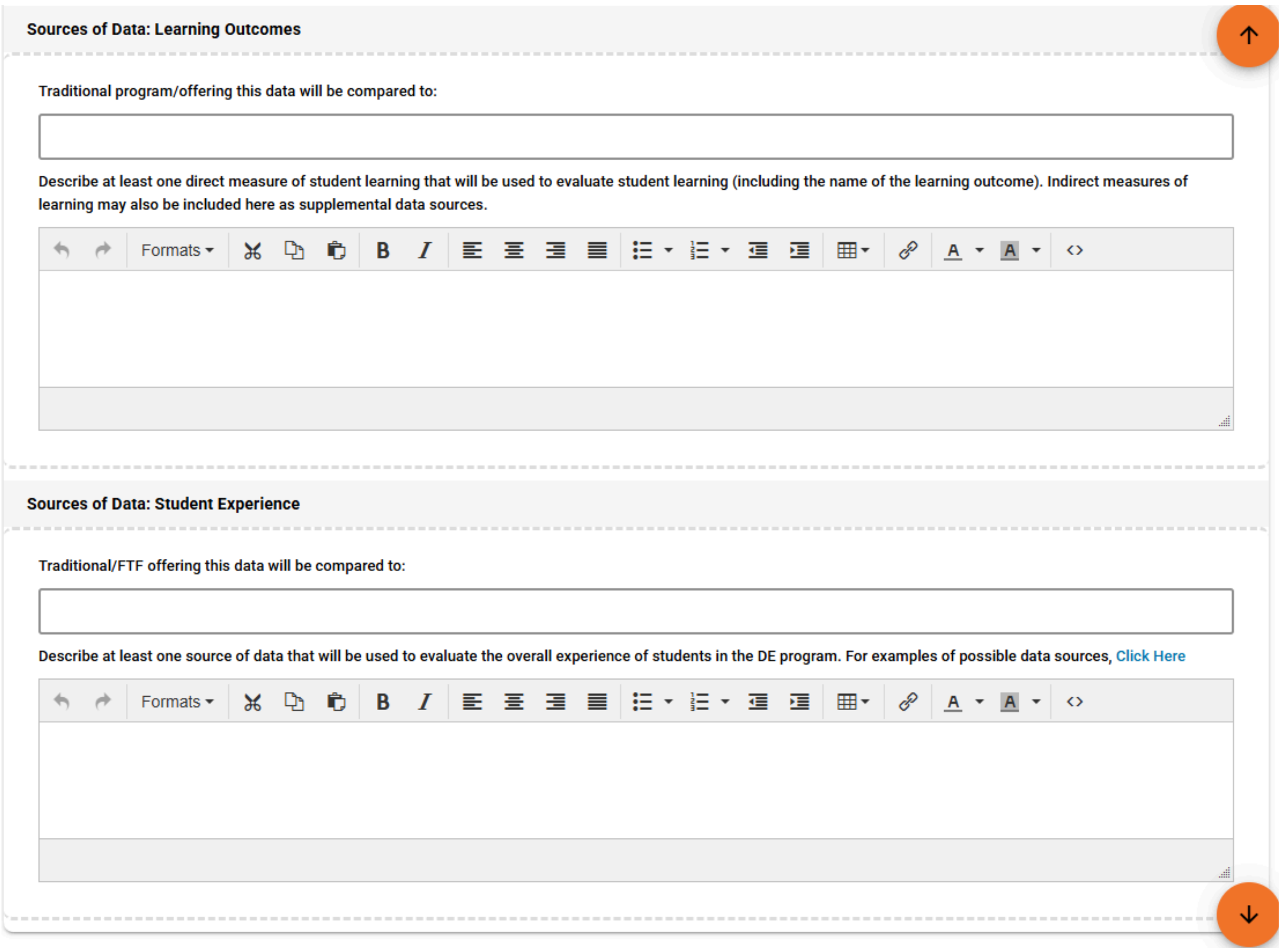
Include an adequate level of detail in the description of data sources. Stating simply that a particular type of data will be used without explaining *how* or *which items* are used is not an appropriate description. For example:

> **Don't write this:** "We will use student course evaluations."
> **Do write this:** "Course evaluations from two required courses will be reviewed. Both courses are offered face-to-face and via asynchronous technology. The following items will be reviewed and compared between the different sections of each course: *Item X*, *Item Y*, *Item Z*. The faculty deem these items to be the most pertinent to the question of whether the program serves its DE students as effectively as its face-to-face students."
>
> **Don't write this:** "The DE program is assessed the same way and the students are held to the same standard as those in FTF programs in the department."
> **Do write this:** "The program reviews the following sources of data to investigate the extent to which student outcomes are comparable between DE students and FTF students in the department, given the faculty and leadership efforts to ensure the two programs are held to the same and highest standards…"
>
> **Don't write this:** "We will look at retention and graduation rates."
> **Do write this:** "Retention and graduation rates for the distance MS program will be compared to those of the FTF MS program. Specifically, we will look at the percentage of MS students who are retained in the program after one year, and the percentage of students who graduated within two years."

Data Collection Plans for Low-Enrolled Programs

Consistently low-enrolled programs must document sources of data annually, even if they are not expecting to be able to report results at the end of the cycle.

Form Screenshot: Sources of Data



Sources of Data: Learning Outcomes

Traditional program/offering this data will be compared to:

Describe at least one direct measure of student learning that will be used to evaluate student learning (including the name of the learning outcome). Indirect measures of learning may also be included here as supplemental data sources.

Formats

Sources of Data: Student Experience

Traditional/FTF offering this data will be compared to:

Describe at least one source of data that will be used to evaluate the overall experience of students in the DE program. For examples of possible data sources, Click Here

Formats

Reporting Stage: Findings & Use of Results

! PLEASE NOTE: The documentation requirements outlined in this manual apply to both the *24-25* and *25-26 Distance Education Program Effectiveness* forms. However, the manual itself reflects the most recent version and includes prompts from the *25-26* forms specifically.

In the second stage of documentation (submitted annually in the Fall semester), DE program coordinators are prompted to document the following:

Findings

1. *What are the specific results from each data source?*

   Most results are likely to be quantitative; however, qualitative results may also be appropriate depending on the data source and how it described under the *Sources of Data* section. For example, open-ended responses from SCEs and surveys might be thematically analyzed.

   The minimum threshold for annual reporting of graduate DE programs is at least five (5) students/data points. The threshold for undergraduate DE program is at least ten (10). Programs with higher enrollment should ensure reported findings are as representative as possible. Consistently low-enrolled DE programs should refer to the relevant information on page 8 of this manual.

2. *Discuss the results as they compare to those from a traditional program/offering.*

   See information under *Comparison to Traditional Programs* on page 4. Specific results should be reported for the traditional program/offering such that direct comparison to the DE program is appropriate.

Use of Results

1. *How was the program ultimately delivered?*

   Program Coordinators select one or more of the following, NOT based on how the program was *approved* to be delivered, but based on how the program was *actually* delivered during the academic year addressed in this report:

- Online – Asynchronously (>50%)
- Online – Synchronously (>50%)
- Face-to-face
- No students enrolled

E.g., A program offered both fully online (with most instruction occurring asynchronously) AND fully face-to-face would select **Online – Asynchronously (>50%)** and **Face-to-face**.

2. *Based on the reported findings, what action(s) will be taken to continue improving the overall effectiveness of the DE program given its unique mode of delivery?*

   Like in the annual *Academic Program Assessment* report, evidence of how findings will be used to improve the program is a required component of the documentation process. Describe the action that will be taken as it relates to the findings, including the following:

   - Tentative timeline for implementation.
   - Party or group responsible for implementation (names not necessary).
   - Rationale for the proposed action.

Reporting in Low-Enrolled DE Programs

Programs should ensure data from at least five (5) students are aggregated and reported. If fewer than five students were enrolled, or if data could only be collected from fewer than five students, the program should aggregate current data with other recent data. In some cases, it may be necessary to aggregate data across multiple academic years.

Form Screenshots: Findings & Use of Results

Sources of Data: Student Experience

Traditional/FTF offering this data will be compared to:

Describe at least one source of data that will be used to evaluate the overall experience of students in the DE program. For examples of possible data sources, Click Here

Formats

Internal Feedback:

Findings: Student Experience

What are the specific results from the data source(s) described above?

Formats

Discuss the results as they compare to those from the traditional/FTF offering(s). Comparisons to other relevant data may also be made here (e.g., longitudinal data, data from other online programs, etc.).

Formats

Use of Results

1

How was the program ultimately delivered in AY25-26? Select all that apply.

- [ ] Online - Asynchronously (>50%)
- [ ] Online - Synchronously (>50%)
- [ ] Face-to-face
- [ ] No students enrolled

Based on the findings reported above, what action(s) will be taken to continue improving the overall effectiveness of the DE program *given its unique mode of delivery?*
Include a tentative timeline, the party or group responsible for implementation, and the rationale for why program faculty believe this will lead to improvements based on the reported findings.
Response should address all DE programs included in this report.

Formats

OIEE Review

OIEE staff review all reports, provide comments, and assign a Compliance Indicator. The purpose of a Compliance Indicator is to quickly communicate to Program Coordinators and Liaisons how well the documentation requirements were met and to help them determine if additional support may be needed. OIEE staff use the rubric below to assign Compliance Indicators.

Compliance Indicator	Criteria
Exemplary	The report goes beyond minimum requirements. This may include the following: ● At least three sources of data are identified and thoroughly described (e.g., one learning outcome and two student experience). ● Comparable traditional program(s)/offering(s) are identified. ● Includes consideration of the needs and circumstances unique to the program's mode of delivery. ● Findings are contextualized and appropriately compared and/or disaggregated (e.g., if multiple DE credentials are included in the same report). ● Clear and detailed explanation as to how the results will be used for DE program improvement.
Sufficient	All minimum requirements are met: ● Two sources of data are identified and described (i.e., one student learning and one student experience). ● Comparable traditional program(s)/offering(s) are identified. ● The final report is clear and well-aligned. Some sections could be strengthened by including more detail or information. ● Findings are contextualized and appropriately compared and/or disaggregated (e.g., if multiple DE credentials are included in the same report). ● Explanation of how the results will be used is for DE program improvement is included. Implementation may not be fully clear but the intent is.
Needs Improvement	All minimum requirements are met, but one or more of the following is true: ● Both required sources of data are described/reported, but descriptions are insufficient or unclear. ● Data lacks meaningful comparison. ● Explanation of how the results will be used for improvement is vague or lacks clear connection to the reported findings and/or mode of delivery.
Noncompliant	Report was not submitted, or one or more required components of the report is missing (sources of data, findings, use of results, comparable programs/contextualization of data). The report does not demonstrate continuous improvement.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Evaluation

Purpose

The goal of assessment is to use data to make informed decisions about teaching, learning, program delivery, equity, and overall institutional effectiveness. Engaging in systematic, integrated, and thoughtful assessment of student learning, the student learning experience, and administrative and support functions helps our campus to ensure a high-quality, equitable experience for all students. OIEE is committed to this endeavor and to assisting our faculty and staff in the continuous improvement of their programs and processes.

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