



Distance Education Program Effectiveness *Reporting Guidelines*

Distance Education (DE) programs are those in which the majority of instruction occurs (or can occur) when students and instructors are not in the same place and thus through distance education technology. Like traditional face-to-face programs, DE programs must be annually assessed.

In addition to participating in the annual program assessment process and per SACSCOC guidelines, **Distance Education programs must also provide evidence that they engage in a systematic review of the programs' overall effectiveness *given* their unique mode of delivery.**

Like annual program assessment, evidence of the review of DE program effectiveness is reported annually in [HelioCampus \(formerly AEFIS\)](#). Program learning outcomes assessment of DE programs is reported in the *Academic Program Assessment* forms. Reporting for overall DE program effectiveness is documented in the *Distance Education Program Effectiveness* form.

This guide provides detailed information about DE reporting in the *Distance Education Program Effectiveness* form only. For information about program learning outcomes assessment, refer to the Academic Program Assessment Guidelines manual available on the OIEE website.

PROMPTS & EXAMPLES

SOURCES OF DATA (Planning Stage) – Submitted annually in the Spring semester

- 1. Will there be students enrolled in this program in the upcoming academic year? (*Program Coordinators select Yes or No from a dropdown menu.*)**

If the department reasonably expects there will be students enrolled in the DE program in the upcoming academic year—whether that means students are already enrolled or the department plans to admit students—**Yes** should be selected from the dropdown menu. If there are not currently any students enrolled, but the program will be listed in the catalog, Yes should be selected.

If students will not be admitted to the DE program—either because admission to the program is on hold or the program is being phased out—**No** should be selected from the dropdown menu.

- 2. Sources of Data: During the upcoming academic year, what data will be used to explicitly examine the effectiveness of the DE program given its unique mode of delivery?**

DE programs have a variety of options when selecting data sources to investigate program effectiveness. The strongest data sources are those from which comparison data can also be drawn (i.e., comparisons between the DE program and a comparable traditional program,

and/or between online course sections and traditional course sections). We also recommend reviewing more than one source of data, as doing so will provide a more complete picture of outcomes in the DE program.

Once data sources are identified, program faculty might consider setting targets or benchmarks. That way, once the data is collected and reviewed, it may be easier to write about the implications of those outcomes during the Reporting stage.

PLEASE NOTE: DE programs that have not begun the Inactivation process in the Curricular Approval Request System, but may be consistently low-enrolled, should have a data collection plan in place and describe it in the *Sources of Data* section.

Here are some examples of appropriate data sources:

- **Program Learning Outcome Assessment Results.** DE programs disaggregate their annual assessment results by mode of delivery (i.e., FTF vs. DE) can use those results in this report. This must include comparison(s) across modes of delivery or with similar programs.
- **Student Course Evaluations (SCEs).** Courses offered in traditional face-to-face and DE modes (i.e., through synchronous or asynchronous technology) can report a comparison of means for standardized items. Fully online programs may still report SCE results, particularly for items that specifically address the DE nature of the program. For other standardized items, however, the case for DE program effectiveness is more easily made when those items are compared between the DE program and a comparable program of the same level (perhaps in the same department). **If you would like for DE-specific items to be added to your SCEs, please have your department liaison contact OIEE.**
- **Surveys.** Graduation surveys are administered to all graduating seniors and master's students. Compare responses between students graduating in traditional programs vs. DE programs. The following are some examples of graduation survey sections/items that might be of interest:
 - Use and value of academic student support services
 - Contributions of the program to developing competencies/skills
 - Perceptions of their preparation for the job market
 - Perceptions of climate and inclusion
 - Quality of the curriculum, teaching, opportunities to collaborate, etc.
 - Overall program quality
 - Overall academic experience
 - Overall experience at TAMU

In the graduation surveys, DE students specifically are asked three open-ended questions that may provide valuable information for this report:

- What (if any) online resources or services could TAMU improve upon to augment the experience of DE students?
 - Were there any services or resources that you needed to help you succeed in your program? If so, which ones?
 - Are there specific services, resources, or activities that you would recommend to help DE students feel more connected to TAMU?
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- **Persistence.** Defined here as the percentage of students who continue pursuing the same program *or* remain in the same department. Ideally the persistence of DE students in a program will be compared to that of non-DE students in the same program *OR* to a comparable face-to-face program.

 - **Retention.** Defined here as the percentage of students who continue pursuing a program at TAMU, but in a different department or college. Ideally the retention of DE students in a program will be compared to that of non-DE students in the same program *OR* to a comparable face-to-face program.

 - **Graduation Rates.** Be sure to specify the timeframe (e.g., % of students who graduated within 2 years, 4 years, 5 years, etc.). Ideally the graduation rate will be compared to that of a comparable face-to-face program.

 - **Time to Graduation.** Average time to graduation for all students who have graduated from the DE program in the last X years. Ideally the time to graduation will be compared to that of a comparable face-to-face program.

When using any of the data sources described above, be specific about how these outcomes are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the DE program given its unique mode of delivery. Remember to focus on comparisons if possible. If not possible, explain why.

Include as much detail as possible. Simply stating that one or more of the above resources is used, without including detail about *how* or what *specific items* are used, is not an appropriate description of data source(s). For example...

Don't write this: "We used student course evaluations."

Do write this: "Course evaluations from two required advanced 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: X, Y, 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 the FTF program."

Do write this: "The program reviews the following specific sources of data to investigate the extent to which student outcomes are comparable between DE students and FTF students, given the faculty's efforts to ensure the two programs are held to the same and highest standards..."

Don't write this: "We looked at retention and graduation rates."

Do write this: "Retention and graduation rates for the distance MS program were compared to those of the other (traditional) MS program in our department. Specifically, we looked at the percentage of MS students who were retained in the program after one year, and the percentage of students who graduated within two years."

NOTE: Programs may use the same sources of data that were submitted in a previous year's *Distance Education Program Effectiveness* form in HelioCampus (formerly AEFIS). Please be sure to review the feedback that was provided previously and make necessary updates.

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS (Reporting Stage) – Submitted annually in the Fall Semester

1. How was the program DE program delivered during AY _____?

Synchronously via DE technology: Majority of instruction is available to and accessed by students in real time with the instructor.

Asynchronously via DE technology: Majority of instruction does not occur in real time. Instructors provide content which the students can access via technology on their own time.

Both synchronously and asynchronously (>50%): The program offers 50% or more of the DE credit hours *synchronously* AND 50% or more of the DE credit hours *asynchronously* (i.e., the program is approved for both synchronous and asynchronous DE delivery and was ultimately delivered both ways).

2. Findings: What are the *specific* findings (quantitative or qualitative) derived from the data sources described above?

Typically, the results reported here will be *quantitative*, particularly if the program uses the sources of data described above. Qualitative findings may be from open-ended responses on surveys or comments on student course evaluations. Be sure to provide the specific results for the DE program and for any comparators that are used.

See the program example on Page 6 for an example of how findings should be reported.

3. Implications: Do the findings demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the program given its unique mode of delivery? If not, what actions will be taken to improve overall effectiveness of the DE program?

Here are some questions DE program faculty might ask when considering how the outcomes speak to the effectiveness of the program given its mode of delivery:

- Is this outcome acceptable? Why or why not?
- Is this outcome expected? Why or why not?
- Is there a non-negligible difference between DE outcomes and comparator outcomes?
- How do these outcomes compare to the same outcomes from previous years?
- Did this data provide actionable information specifically about the effectiveness of the DE program? If not, what data might be used in the future?

Provide the answers to the relevant questions above in your response.

See an example of quality DE program effectiveness documentation on the next page.

Example DE Program Effectiveness Report

Name of Program: Distance Program, MS

1. Data Sources:

(1) Student course evaluation results will be compared between the asynchronous and face-to-face sections of the 690 course. Students take this course as a culminating experience. Though we will review all items on the SCEs, the items of most interest are the following: *This course helped me learn concepts or skills as stated in course objectives* and *Feedback in this course helped me learn*. The following items specific to the online sections will also be reviewed: *I felt like part of the class (not isolated, alone, or cut off)* and *The instructor recognized the unique needs of distance learners and planned accordingly*.

(2) In addition to reviewing SCE results, we will also compare program learning outcome (PLO) assessment results between students in the Distance Program MS and the Face-To-Face MS (also in our department). These programs follow a similar curriculum and have several learning outcomes in common. Specifically, we will compare assessment results for the *Develop theoretically sound research plans* PLO. Students in both MS degrees take a course taught in both modalities wherein they develop their own research plan. The rubric for this assignment includes a category for theoretically sound research and the outcome is defined at the same performance levels--*Needs Improvement* (1) to *Exceeds Expectations* (5).

2. Findings:

(1)

Item	DE	FTF
<i>This course helped me learn concepts or skills as stated in course objectives</i> (4-point scale)	3.84	3.89
<i>Feedback in this course helped me learn</i> (6-point scale)	5.34	5.15
<i>I felt like part of the class (not isolated, alone, or cut off)</i> (5-point scale)	3.75	--
<i>The instructor recognized the unique needs of distance learners and planned accordingly</i> (5-point scale)	4.56	--

(2) Rubric scores on the *Theoretically sound research plans* rubric criterion were disaggregated by program/mode of delivery. The average criterion score for the FTF MS students was 4.79 and the average for the DE MS students was 4.74.

3. Implications: Across sources of data, there does not appear to be meaningful differences between outcomes of students in the DE program versus comparators. All scores/results are relatively high (positive) and indicate students in the DE program are achieving outcomes in at the same level as their FTF peers. There are two things to note: (1) DE students reported more helpful feedback than students in the FTF sections of the 690 course. Though the FTF is not concerningly low, it indicates to us that we should reiterate with all faculty the importance of providing meaningful feedback to students. (2) On a 5-point scale, the SCE item pertaining to feeling like DE students were a part of their online course earned a 3.75 average. This is not ideal, and we would like to see this number above 4 in the future. We

plan to implement a resource page on the department website for faculty who teach course sections via technology. This resource page will include strategies for class engagement and creating an effective community of learning.