Distance Education: Telecommunications/Correspondence Courses
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Distance Education refers to any mode of instruction in which there is a separation, in time or place, between the instructor and student.

ED's eligibility regulations define two types of distance education:

• correspondence courses (including some courses offered on video cassettes), and
• telecommunications courses offered via television, audio or computer (including the Internet).

Telecommunications Courses

Telecommunications programs at domestic schools are considered eligible FSA programs if they have been accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Department for accreditation of distance education. They are not subject to the rules that apply to correspondence coursework, which are discussed in the next section.

A telecommunications course is one that is offered principally through the use of one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between these students and the instructor, whether asynchronously or in "real-time."

These technologies include:

> • Television, audio, or computer transmission through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, and
> • audio and computer conferencing.

A course taught through video cassettes or discs is also considered a telecommunications course, but only if the course is delivered to students physically attending classes at the school providing the course during the same award year and if another technology is employed to support interaction between the students and the instructor.

Distance courses that do not qualify as a telecommunications course are considered to be correspondence courses.

Correspondence Courses

Unlike telecommunicatons courses, which are now treated in the same way as all other eligible programs, some restrictions apply to correspondence courses.

Definition of "correspondence course"
A correspondence course is a home-study course provided by a school under which the school provides instructional materials, including examinations on the materials, to students who are not physically attending classes at the school. When a student completes a portion of the instructional materials, the student takes the examinations that relate to that portion of the materials and returns the examinations to the school for grading.

• If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the course is considered to be a correspondence course.
• If a school adds telecommunications technology, such as electronic delivery of course materials or an online discussion board, to a correspondence course, the school must ascertain the predominant method of instruction (correspondence or telecommunications), keeping in mind that a telecommunications course must use technology to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. The school must apply the rules for the predominant method, in administering its participation in the FSA programs.

School eligibility: limits on correspondence courses and correspondence students
If a school offers more than 50% of its courses by correspondence, the school loses its eligibility to participate in the FSA. Similarly, if 50% or more of a school's students are enrolled in its correspondence courses, the school loses its eligibility to participate in the FSA programs.

Calculating the percentage of correspondence students

All enrolled regular students must be counted. (A regular student is "a person enrolled for the purpose of obtaining a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered by the school.")

• A school must use a straight head count of enrolled students, including full-time and part-time students and students who don't receive aid as well as FSA recipients.

• If a student withdrew from the school and received a full refund the student is not counted. Using the latest complete award year, the formula for determining the percentage of enrolled students is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{number of regular students enrolled in the school's correspondence courses}}{\text{number of regular students enrolled in all of the school's courses}} = \% \text{ of correspondence students}$$