

STANDARD TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO DISTANCE COURSES
Created by representatives from UCEP and CCGA, April 20, 2023.

DEFINITIONS

Distance education: a mode of instruction in which some or all students are physically separated from the instructor. Includes online and hybrid courses. Federal regulations and [WSCUC/WASC](#) require distance education courses to offer faculty-initiated regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors.

Substantive interaction: Faculty must engaged students in at least two of the following:

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(From WSCUC/WASC [substantive change manual](#).)

Courses can be classified according to the mode of instruction:

- **In-person course:** Requires a physical classroom. Primary instruction contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture) take place in person. May include occasional online contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture), whether synchronous or asynchronous.
- **Online course:** Does not require a physical classroom. All primary instruction contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture) take place online. Format may be synchronous, asynchronous, or both.
- **Hybrid course:** Requires a physical classroom. Primary instruction consists of both in-person contact hours and intentional and regular online contact hours, whether synchronous or asynchronous.
- **Mixed enrollment course:** Requires a physical classroom for some but not all students. Some students receive instruction in person; others, online.

A hybrid course, for approval and accreditation purposes, can be further classified based on instructional contact hours.

The definition of **instructional contact hours** is:

Time spent in lecture, seminar, lab, discussion section, etc., with the instructor of record. Instructional contact hours are equivalent to the number of hours per week for which a room would be scheduled for an in-person version of this course. Does not include office

hours, final examinations, pre-recorded videos, or interactions with teaching assistants (see WASC).

A hybrid course is classified according to the fraction of primary instructional contact time that occurs in person:

- **Hybrid in-person courses** are hybrid courses in which 50% or more of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person.
- **Hybrid online courses** are hybrid courses in which less than 50% of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person.

Distance education courses are those in which less than 50% of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person for some or all students. This category encompasses online and hybrid online – these two subcategories are treated similarly in accreditation and approval processes.

Programs may be classified as an **in-person program**, **online program**, or **hybrid program** according to the mix of course types. WASC considers online programs and some hybrid programs to be distance education.

- **Multiple-format programs** are programs that are offered in different modalities, such as online, hybrid, or in-person. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid,” but rather as “multiple-format.”
- **Joint degree programs** involve more than one department or school. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid.”
- **Blended degree programs** involve more than one degree, e.g., MD/PhD. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid.”

Teaching format is defined as how course material is presented:

- **In person** is content delivered in person in real time.
- **Synchronous** is online content delivered remotely in real time.
- **Asynchronous** is online content available online and not delivered in real time (e.g., pre-recorded).

POLICY NOTES

Courses that allow some students to enroll with the expectation of online instruction and some with the expectation of in-person instruction (sometimes termed “hy-flex”) count as **online** or **online hybrid** as long as the online students will receive less than 50% of instruction in-person.

We recommend the following **terms no longer be used**:

- **Hybrid enrollment**: Has been used to refer to courses where some students participate in contact hours exclusively online (and register accordingly) and some students participate in

person (and register accordingly). The same content is delivered to students whether they participate online or in person. However, due to the use of “hybrid” to describe teaching modalities, it is recommended to use “mixed enrollment” instead.

- **Remote course:** Can be used to describe a method of participating or working in a course, but not to describe a course.