

**University of Colorado at Colorado  
Springs**

**Institutional Change Request**

**to**

**Remove the Stipulation Requiring Prior  
Commission Approval of Distance  
Education Programs**

**NCA Institutional Change Proposal  
for the  
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs**

**1. What change is being proposed?**

**• Specific change being proposed**

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) is requesting that the stipulation that prior Commission approval is required for additional distance education programs be removed.

**• Expected outcomes**

As a result of this change, the institution expects to become more responsive to the needs of its students and potential students by reducing the amount of time required to be able to offer existing degrees online. As a result, the institution expects to serve additional students whom it might otherwise not be able to serve. Some of these students may pursue degrees entirely online, but a significant number would probably be primarily taking courses on-campus, supplementing their degree progress by participating in distance education offerings.

**• Impact on mission, students and breadth of educational offerings**

The policy of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, as well as the practice of UCCS, is that online offerings be rooted in the existing programs authorized for offering on-campus. All existing programs are congruent with the mission of the campus, and provisions are in place (approval by the Board of Regents and review by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education for mission congruence) to ensure that all new degree program proposals are also aligned with the campus' mission.

Students at UCCS are frequently non-traditional (in terms of age, being first-generation, income and other characteristics). Flexibility in meeting degree requirements is especially highly-valued by these students. Many students predominantly taking courses on-campus, therefore, would benefit from greater availability of online coursework. In addition, there are some special populations a greater variety of online offerings would allow UCCS to serve more fully. Southern Colorado is largely rural, so that accessibility to many of the programs present at UCCS is quite limited. In addition, the size of the active duty and reserve military community in Colorado Springs means there are a disproportionate number of people (in this case, active duty military members and their dependents, as well as reservists) who could benefit from the programs UCCS offers, but whose deployment to Colorado Springs may not be long enough to allow degree completion. By providing greater ability to begin or finish a degree at a distance, as well as to continue to make

degree progress while temporarily assigned elsewhere, these students would benefit greatly.

At this time, the institution does not envision offering degree programs that would be available only online, so the impact on the breadth of offerings is probably minimal.

- **Relevant Commission policy**

This request would constitute a change in the relationship with the Commission (Policy I.C.2.d) by removing the requirement that individual additional distance degrees receive prior Commission approval.

## **2. What factors led the organization to undertake the proposed change?**

- **Relationship with ongoing planning efforts**

UCCS has been thoroughly engaged in planning efforts over the last ten years or more. Each successive round of planning has built upon the previous plans already in place, beginning with the 1997 University Plan, continuing through the 1999 Total Learning Environment Implementation Plan, the 2003 Vision 2010 Plan, the 2003 Strategic Investments in Long-term Outcomes document and, most recently, Inventing the Future. One of the ongoing themes in all of those documents was the need better to meet our students' legitimate accessibility needs. Another was the desirability of using technology appropriately to accomplish this. Yet another is the necessity of using the campus' limited resources in an innovative fashion to fulfill these goals. This last objective, in particular, depends crucially on flexibility to allow colleges and even departments to pursue opportunities and strategies that will allow them to meet student needs.

As part of the campus' on-going planning efforts, a campus policy on electronically-mediated instruction is in the beginning stages of development. This effort will be taking place within the context of a larger, much broader strategic planning process scheduled to be reported to the regents in May, 2007. The campus' intent is to have the new policy approved this spring.

- **Needs analysis**

As mentioned previously, many UCCS students regularly express the desire for greater flexibility in meeting degree requirements. Not all students, of course, will prefer distance delivery as a means to accomplish this end, but a considerable number have expressed an interest. Further, potential students, particularly those associated with the military or already advancing in careers that require frequent travel, often express an interest in distance options. Likewise, students working in rural Colorado may benefit from this access.

**3. What necessary approvals have been obtained to implement the proposed change?**

The campus leadership team approved initiating this request. Approval of additional online degree programs by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education would still be required on a case by case basis. Likewise, the faculty in each college would approve each program. In the case of graduate programs, they would also be approved by the Graduate School Executive Committee.

**4. What impact might the proposed change have on challenges identified by the commission as part of or subsequent to the last comprehensive visit?**

In the report on the 1997 visit, the team recommended the stipulation that “programs offered by distance delivery be limited to the MBA and MPA.” The explanation for this recommendation was “the experimental nature of the delivery system for the two programs being offered and the need to monitor and evaluate the relative success of the current programs prior to offering any additional program through this medium.” Many changes have occurred since then, including a transition in the delivery system of the two original programs and the Commission-approved addition of several more distance programs. By any measure, the delivery systems used to deliver these programs are far from experimental at this point, and the programs are demonstrably successful. In short, the very real challenges identified in 1997 have been met.

**5. What are the organization’s plans to implement and sustain the proposed changes?**

**• Faculty and staff involvement in implementation**

Distance education at UCCS is decentralized. This means that the colleges control the programs in each academic area, and each college has a robust internal system of faculty governance that insures that all programs are operated by faculty. Staff are employed in each college with distance programs to facilitate the operation of those programs. The success of current programs is the best evidence of the campus’ ability to develop and sustain additional programs.

**• Administrative structure**

The campus’ existing administrative structure is already designed to accommodate this stipulation removal. In addition to the deans in each college, programs offered through extended studies, as most of the distance offerings are and will be, at least in part, are subject to the campus extended studies policy administered by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The use of campus information technology infrastructure and agreements with platform providers is administered through the Director of Information Technology. The Faculty Associate for Information Technology, who works closely with the Director of Information Technology, chairs the Information Technology Advisory Committee and the Student Technology Fee

Committee, acts as the liaison to the CU system on major technology policy committees, provides leadership in developing and updating the campus technology plan, and researches new technology in the areas of distance education and classroom technology. The policy consideration now underway will give the campus the opportunity to re-visit the organization of distance programs.

**• Learning and support services**

Each college provides support to students and faculty appropriate to the level and nature of the activity in that college. In addition, faculty and student access to distance learning platforms is mediated and other resources are provided through a campus website (please see <http://www.uccs.edu/~online/> for more information). The Teaching and Learning Center provides support to college and faculty course development and teaching efforts (please see <http://www.uccs.edu/~tlc/resources/onlineteaching/onlineteaching.htm> for additional information). The Kraemer Family Library has extensive electronic resources and has made other arrangements to serve the needs of distance learners (please see <http://web.uccs.edu/library/> for more information). Likewise the campus bookstore has made arrangements to support access to materials for students not physically on campus (please see <http://www.uccs.edu/bookstore/choices1.htm> for more information).

**• Financial data**

Distance learners who are Colorado residents are eligible for state support. Under CCHE policy, non-residents taking distance courses are allowed to be charged tuition as a non-state-funded program. That means that tuition may be set by the campus for out-of-state students. Since out-of-state tuition rates are much higher than resident rates, current programs typically charge less than out-of-state tuition for distance programs, but more than enough to cover the costs of offering the program. In some cases, programs have chosen to charge in-state residents the higher extended studies tuition in order to cover the costs of the program. Students under resident tuition are charged a fee to cover the third-party costs associated with the delivery platform used. The campus is currently investigating a tuition-return model for colleges to encourage them to offer more distance courses at resident tuition rates.

**6. What are the organization's plans to evaluate the proposed changes?**

**• Assessment of student learning**

Campus program assessment practices include a provision that all programs be assessed. Since only authorized programs may be offered by distance, all programs offered at a distance are already being assessed on-campus. Programs offered by distance delivery must collect, analyze and report data for the distance program separately from on-campus offerings.