Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

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Distance Delivery Confirmation Form

Confirmation of Institutional Eligibility for Distance Delivery Approval

In 2010, the Commission adopted new policies and definitions for distance delivery that affect all institutions, in part to comply with federal requirements governing such offerings (see below.) As a result of these changes, some institutions now have distance education or correspondence education offerings on record with the Commission that were not on record under the former policies and definitions. Because Commission approval is required for distance and correspondence education, the Commission must now review these institutions for the capacity to offer distance and correspondence education. The Commission will do so for each institution in a single review. Many of these reviews will be done via Commission staff desk review or peer panels; other reviews will require site visits.

Background Information on Distance Delivery[1]

Higher Learning Commission (HLC) policies outline when institutions need to notify the Commission about distance-delivered instruction and when they need to seek approval. (See policy 3.2(a) and the information below.)

This document defines the characteristics of distance delivery, specifies when institutions must notify the Commission or seek approval for distance delivery, and provides the form for seeking approval.

Commission Definitions for Distance-Delivered Courses and Programs

The Higher Learning Commission uses the following definitions for the purpose of applying its policy on distance delivery to its accredited and candidate institutions:

- Distance-delivered **courses** are those in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

- Distance-delivered **programs** are those certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered **courses.**

Reporting and Seeking Approval for Distance-Delivered Offerings

The chart below identifies the Percentage Brackets for determining the scope of distance delivery by an institution. The Commission determines the appropriate Percentage Bracket for each institution. Such determination is based on information provided by the institution in its Annual Institutional Data Update to the Commission or when it seeks and receives approval of a proposed change.

Percentage Bracket	Percentage of Distance-Delivered Offerings (calculations are based on degree programs, not certificates)
3	Up to 100% of total degree programs
2	Up to 20% of total degree programs
1	Initiation of distance-delivered offerings up to 5% of total degree programs
0	No degree programs or more than four certificate programs (Commission policy does permit the institution to offer up to four certificate programs as well as a limited number of courses leading to degree programs through distance education or correspondence education without seeking prior approval.)

Higher Learning Commission policy requires an institution to seek the Commission's prior approval if the institution plans to **initiate** or **expand** its distance-delivered offerings as described below. When initiation or expansion is anticipated, an institution must submit a substantive change request using the form contained in this document.

Initiation occurs and a review is required when the institution:

- plans to initiate its first distance education degree program, even when it has been approved to offer distance education certificates or correspondence education degree programs or certificates;
- plans to initiate its first correspondence education degree program, even when it has been approved to offer correspondence education certificates or distance education degree programs or certificates;
- has initiated four distance education certificates and plans to initiate a fifth, unless the institution has already been reviewed and approved to offer one or more distance education degree programs; or
- has initiated four correspondence education certificates and plans to initiate a fifth, unless the institution has already been reviewed and approved to offer one or more correspondence education degree programs.

Expansion occurs and a review is required when the institution:

- plans to increase its current activity in distance education degree programs or its current activity in correspondence education degree programs to a higher Percentage Bracket.

In addition, the Commission may require a substantive change evaluation if the institution:

- has never had a focused review of distance or correspondence degree or certificate programs and is offering one or more programs or five or more certificates; or
- has a significant annual increase in enrollment.

In addition to reviewing distance-delivered courses and programs through its substantive change processes, the Commission evaluates distance delivery whenever it comprehensively reviews an institution. In these comprehensive reviews, the Commission examines the institution's capacity to provide education to its students and the quality of its performance in doing so, whether via distance delivery or traditional face-to-face modes. Comprehensive reviews examine curriculum, staffing, support services, access to appropriate laboratory and library resources, and all other facets of quality higher education.

Questions

For general questions on approval of distance-delivered programs, send an e-mail to changerequests@hlcommission.org or call 800-621-7440 x137. For institution-specific questions, contact the

Commission staff liaison assigned to the institution by calling 800-621-7440 and asking to be transferred to the liaison.

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[1] Wherever distance delivery is mentioned throughout this document it means distance or correspondence delivery. The following are the Federal definitions (2009) of distance and correspondence education:

Correspondence education means:

(1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor.

(2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.

(3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.

(4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

Distance Education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include:

(1) The internet;

(2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;

(3) Audio conferencing; or

(4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

Distance Delivery Confirmation Form

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Submitting the Distance Delivery Confirmation of Eligibility Form

Answers to the questions below will constitute the documentation needed for the Commission to confirm the institution's eligibility for distance delivery approval.

The questions are designed to elicit brief, succinct, detailed information, rather than a narrative or references to extensive supporting documents. Do not attach other documents unless they are specifically requested in the questions. The total submission should be no more than 8-10 pages. Submit the completed application as a single electronic document (in Adobe PDF format) emailed to changerequests@hlcommission.org.

Institution: Western State College of Colorado **City, State:** Gunnison, CO

Name of person completing this application: Dr. Terri Wenzlaff

Title: Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies

Phone: 970.943.2135 **Email:** twenzlaff@western.edu

Date: June 29, 2012

☒ Approval of distance education offerings ☐ Approval of correspondence education offerings

Part 1. Institutional Context

1. Is the institution, in its relations with other regional, specialized, or national accrediting agencies, currently under or recommended for a negative status or action (e.g., withdrawal, probation, sanction, warning, or show-cause, etc.)?	YES **NO**	
2. Is the institution now undergoing or facing substantial monitoring, special review, or financial restrictions from the U.S. Dept. of Education or other federal or state government agencies?	YES **NO**	
3. Has the institution's senior leadership or Board membership experienced substantial resignations or removals in the past year?	**YES** NO	The provost is retiring as of June 30, 2012 and the enrollment management VP is moving to a new position. Both amicable departures.

4. Is the institution experiencing financial difficulty through such conditions as a currently declared state of exigency, a deficit of 10% or more, or a default or failure to make payroll during the past year, or consecutive deficits in the two most recent years?	YES **NO**	
5. Is the institution experiencing other pressures that might affect its ability to carry out the proposal (e.g., a collective bargaining dispute or a significant lawsuit)?	YES **NO**	

Part 2. Characteristics of the Change Requested

6. What percentage of the institution's total degree programs is currently offered through distance delivery (see page 1 for the Commission's definition of distance-delivered programs)? **Please specify the percentage offered by distance education AND the percentage offered by correspondence education.**

   BA/BFA – 0 of 25 (0%)
   MA/MFA – 2 of 2 (100%)

7. What organizational structures are in place to ensure effective oversight, implementation, and management of the institution's distance-delivered offerings?

   Western's ability to oversee and administer academic programs is independent of delivery method. This academic structure includes the Vice President for Academic Affairs Office**,** Faculty Senate, and all standing committees of the Faculty Senate (i.e. Graduate Council, Curriculum Committee, Academic Policies). This approach has helped the College ensure quality and consistent expectations of educational outcomes. This is not to say that distance-delivered programs do not have unique needs and attributes that require specific attention. As is outlined through the remainder of this consideration of best practices, Western's structure provides the development, coordination, support, and oversight of distance-offered programs that ensure quality and effectiveness comparable to those currently offered under the College's current accreditation status.

8. Does the institution have a separately identified organizational unit for providing or marketing the distance-delivered offerings? ( ) Yes **(X) No**

   If yes, please explain how this separate unit coordinates with other academic and administrative units across the institution to ensure the consistency and quality of offerings.

9. If the institution has any involvement by external organizations (other than accredited higher education institutions) in key operations as identified below, provide the information requested for each involvement. (Note that such involvement by a parent company or by one of its subsidiaries external to the institution in any of these operations should be reported.)

Type of involvement	Name(s) of external organization(s)	% of Involvement
A. Support for delivery of instruction	N/A	
B. Recruitment and admission of students	N/A	

C. Course placement and advising of students	N/A	
D. Design and oversight of curriculum	N/A	
E. Direct instruction and oversight	N/A	

10. If the institution has any involvement with other accredited higher education institutions in key operations identified above, provide the name(s) of the other institutions and the nature of the involvement.
    Colorado State University Global (CSU-Global) Campus – The Teacher Education Program has partnered with CSU-Global which entails Western providing 18 licensure credits for CSU-Global students, which CSU accepts in transfer.

11. Operational Data

Operational Data	**Last year (actual tallies)**	**This year (estimate)**	**Next year (projected)**
A. Total annual (academic year + summer) student credit hours generated	62,204	59,610	60,000
B. Total annual student credit hours generated in distance-delivered sections (if available)	2,732	2,902	3,000
C. Percentage of student credit hours in distance-delivered courses (B/C, or B divided by A, rounded up to the nearest integer)	5%	5%	5%
D. Total number of academic programs (i.e., counting different majors at all levels)	27	27	29
E. Total number of programs in item D above available via distance delivery (i.e., 50% or more of courses available as distance-delivered courses)	2	2	3
F. Percentage of programs available via distance delivery (100 x E/D)	8%	8%	10%

Part 3. Institution's History with Distance-Delivered Offerings

12. Briefly describe the institution's experience with distance-delivered offerings.
    The low-residency MA in Education began its evolution in 2004 through the delivery of a post BA licensure program at the undergraduate level. The enrollment numbers in this program averaged 81 from 2004-2011. In 2004, the Teacher Education Program was awarded a Federal Teacher Quality Enhancement grant to study the quality of the current delivery model and student outcomes. The study led to the further redesign of the curriculum to the current graduate program. The graduate curriculum was reviewed through the campus faculty governance process (i.e., Graduate Council,

Curriculum Committee, Faculty Senate, Board of Trustees) and the state (i.e., Colorado Department of Education and Colorado Commission on Higher Education).

The low-residency MFA in Creative Writing evolved from faculty expertise and interest, a desire to meet the needs of students, and an ability to fill the needs of unmet markets. For example, in the Commercial Fiction Concentration, students have the ability for authorship which is not the norm in similar programs; the Poetry Concentration allows students opportunities to focus entirely on formal poetry; and the Screenwriting Concentration provides our undergraduate students the opportunity to extend their learning and become screenwriters. The MFA degree was initiated by the Communication Arts, Languages and Literature (CALL) faculty members and was reviewed and approved by the campus faculty governance process and by an expert in the field.

The graduate programs have an online delivery component because it is the best way to deliver the content within these two professional fields. The curriculum drove the instructional delivery choice, not the reverse. For example, the ability to practice pedagogical skills under the guidance of a mentor, within the network and supports of local communities, enhances program quality. The online delivery method was a thoughtful decision made by both the Teacher Education and English faculty, and the decision was approved by the campus through the faculty governance process and the administration.

13. If the Higher Learning Commission approves the institution's initiation or expansion of distance delivery, what future growth does the institution anticipate (e.g., in the next six months, three years, 10-20 years)?
    Six Months – Faculty on campus are in the process of adding two to three new graduate programs. Two of these would likely be low-residency programs with significant distance-delivery.
    Three Years – It is likely that that two to three more graduate programs using distance-delivery could be added. It is unlikely that we will add undergraduate programs that have any significant online component as our resident campus is one of our main strengths.
    Ten-Twenty Years – Our statutory role and mission states that Western is to have "a limited number of graduate programs" and it is likely that Western would propose more than a total of ten graduate programs most of which would incorporate a distance-delivery model.

14. How does the institution plan to manage this growth?
    Growth is managed through a well-designed faculty governance process with a solid working relationship between faculty and administration. The Graduate Dean currently is a half-time position which could expand as graduate programs are added. Processes are in place for relevant discussions to occur which would assist in managing growth.

Part 4. Institutional Planning for Distance-Delivered Offerings

15. What concerns or expected improvements identified in previous Commission evaluations are applicable to distance delivery and how has the institution addressed them? (If none were raised, simply state "None.")
    None

16. How does the institution determine the need for distance-delivered offerings? How does the institution decide whether traditional programs should be offered via distance delivery?
    The faculty within the respective program determine whether the curriculum and prospective students can be best served by the delivery method. The distance-delivery model is used only when it is determined by faculty to be the best delivery method.

17. How does the institution plan the role of distance delivery at the institution; i.e., for changes and future expansion of distance delivery? Who is involved? How do new ideas and initiatives originate, and how are they examined and evaluated?
    Faculty members develop the curriculum for prospective or expanded programs. These curricular proposals are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee, Faculty Senate, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Board of Trustees, and the state if needed.

18. How does the institution ensure that financial planning and budgeting for distance-delivered offerings are realistic? What are the institution's projected revenues and expenses?
    As cash-funded programs through the Extended Studies Office, it is the responsibility of the Program Directors to stay within budget. This is overseen by the Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

19. How does the institution assure that promotion, marketing, and enrollment of its distance-delivered offerings stay in balance with its actual resources and technical capabilities?
    Promotion and marketing are overseen by the Program Directors and thus each graduate program attracts students through venues particular to their respective content areas. Promotion and marketing, particularly in the MFA Program, is supported by the high caliber faculty who teach in the Program. There is a balance between marketing and promotion and the enrollment that programs can sustain given faculty and technological resources. Enrollment management is closely scrutinized by the respective program directors and the Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies. Additionally, each program has admission criteria to monitor the quality and number of students who enter each program. As cash-funded programs through the Extended Studies Office, it is the responsibility of the Extended Studies Director, Program Directors, and Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies to stay within budget.

20. What controls are in place to ensure that the information presented to students in advertising, brochures, and other communications will be accurate?
    The Extended Studies Director, Program Directors, and the Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies review materials to ensure truth in advertising for the two graduate programs with a distance-delivery model.

Part 5. Curriculum and Instructional Design

21. How does the institution assure good instructional design in its distance-delivered offerings? How are the institution's faculty and quality control mechanisms involved in the instructional design process?
    Faculty members develop curriculum, which is approved or not through the Curriculum Committee, Faculty Senate, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Board of Trustees. Western's shared governance system is one of checks and balances. Program assessment analysis is used to continually improve instruction.

22. What processes and procedures does the institution use for technology maintenance, upgrades, back up, remote services, and for communicating changes in software, hardware or technical systems to students and faculty?
    The technical and physical plant facilities, including staffing and technical assistance, appropriately support the low-residency delivery model. Blackboard Learn version 9.1, the learning management system, is hosted onsite and our contract arrangement is licensing, software maintenance and support. There is 24/7 technical support provided for Blackboard Learn 9.1 system administrators. Blackboard Learn 9.1 has been used as the learning management system since 1998. (Technically, the campus has hosted a learning management system since 1998. Originally the campus used WebCT then Blackboard 6, followed by 8, and now 9.1.) Unplanned outages are very rare, current uptime exceeds 99.9%. The Blackboard Learn 9.1 site is password protected and uses SSL encryption on the entire site. The LMS is integrated with the campus student information system which manages user accounts, courses and enrollments.

    Available to the campus beginning October 2009, was the expansion of bandwidth from partial OC3 to total 80 megabits. Currently, Western now has 135 mb available on campus. The institution has the ability to reserve bandwidth for online delivery applications. Self-funded budgets financially share the costs to support the technologies employed such as SoftChalk. The contracts for the technologies employed provide for all new upgrades to the software. Contracts are renewed on a yearly basis.

Qualified faculty and IT staff are available, operational, and appropriate to support all programs currently being delivered including graduate programs. Informal supports available include student help desk, which offers web-based remote support, faculty mentors, course instructors, and fellow cohort students. Additionally, Western has begun a new campus position (spring 2012), Director of Educational Technology and Program Development, which is designed to assist faculty in building high quality courses.

23. How does the institution assure that it provides convenient, reliable, and timely services to students or faculty needing technical assistance, and how does it communicate information about these services?

    Western's computing infrastructure and support services are responsive to student and faculty needs. The Information Technology Committee is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate. This group of faculty representatives provides direct communication to the administration and IT staff on technology needs, including the technical framework needed for electronic delivery. Conversely, the administration and IT staff benefit from the committee's insights and advice regarding any proposed changes in technological services. This promotes smooth transitions with inevitable hardware or software changes and minimizes the impact on students and faculty.

    The institution has committed to Blackboard Learn 9.1 as the learning management system and the use of online faculty recommended supporting software (i.e. SoftChalk interactive designer software, and the Microsoft Office suite). Consequently, when students or instructors proceed from one course or program to another the software programs and technical procedures remain the same. This allows for both the instructor and student to focus on content and not the technical requirements of the course. Institutional systems and procedures are in place for training both faculty and students in the required software and technology requirements of online instruction and are outlined in the Faculty and Student Support sections of this document.

    The Director of Instructional Technology and Program Development provides 24/7 support and individualized assistance to meet faculty needs.

24. What is the institution's experience, if any, in collaborating with other institutions or organizations to provide distance-delivered education?

    None

25. If the institution engages in partnerships or agreements with external organizations or institutions as identified in Questions 9 and 10, how does the institution ensure that students can use these services effectively?

    CSU-Global – All students have the same access to faculty, staff, and resources.

Part 6. Institutional Staffing and Faculty Support

26. How does the institution staff distance-delivered offerings? How does this differ from the institution's processes for staffing traditional offerings?

    The distance learning programs are cash-funded through graduate tuition. Individuals are hired through the funds made available by tuition. The traditional course offerings are general fund from the state and through tuition. In the case of excess funds from distance-delivered graduate programs, dollars are used to support traditional undergraduate education.

27. What is the institution's process for selecting, training, and orienting faculty for distance delivery? What special professional development, support, or released time does the institution provide for faculty who teach distance-delivered offerings?

    Common faculty hiring and evaluation procedures are used regardless of what mode of delivery is used in the program. Within this hiring and review structure, faculty members with responsibilities in electronic delivery have specific expectations regarding instructional delivery such as providing asynchronous and synchronous instruction. Once faculty members are hired they undergo training directed by the respective program director about the required processes for teaching and delivering instruction online. For example, the MFA faculty members undergo a several day orientation before

instructing a new cohort of students. Additionally, Western has employed an instructional technology specialist who provides professional development and assistance for online faculty members. Another venue which provides professional development for all faculty members is the Center for Teaching Excellence which provides many faculty learning opportunities during the academic year.

The low-residency programs have undergone the same review and receive no less oversight as those programs that might not utilize electronic delivery. The faculty governance committees on campus, including the recently formed graduate studies council and graduate faculty, will oversee these low-residency programs as they do programs delivered by other means.

28. How does the institution assure copyright compliance and keep distance delivery faculty aware of institutional policies on using others' intellectual property?

Copyright regulations for materials used in the online delivery of graduate courses at Western State College fall under the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization (TEACH) Act. Section 5.12 of the Board of Trustees Manual provides a summary of Copyright Law Fair Use Provisions and Agreement on Guidelines for Classroom Copying.

Faculty teaching online in the graduate program have agreed and will be required to comply with the TEACH Act and demonstrate compliance with the following TEACH Act checklist. The TEACH Act New Roles, Rules, and Responsibilities for Academic Institutions can be found following the checklist.

Faculty TEACH Act Compliance Checklist

(taken directly from the University of Texas System, Office of General Counsel at http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/IntellectualProperty/teachact.htm#actsummary)

- ❑ My institution is a nonprofit accredited educational institution or a governmental agency
- ❑ It has a policy on the use of copyrighted materials
- ❑ It provides accurate information to faculty, students and staff about copyright
- ❑ Its systems will not interfere with technological controls within the materials I want to use
- ❑ The materials I want to use are specifically for students in my class
- ❑ Only those students will have access to the materials
- ❑ The materials will be provided at my direction during the relevant lesson
- ❑ The materials are directly related and of material assistance to my teaching content
- ❑ My class is part of the regular offerings of my institution
- ❑ I will include a notice that the materials are protected by copyright
- ❑ I will use technology that reasonably limits the students' ability to retain or further distribute the materials
- ❑ I will make the materials available to the students only for a period of time that is relevant to the context of a class session
- ❑ I will store the materials on a secure server and transmit them only as permitted by this law
- ❑ I will not make any copies other than the one I need to make the transmission
- ❑ The materials are of the proper type and amount the law authorizes:

  - ❑ Entire performances of nondramatic literary and musical works

  - ❑ Reasonable and limited parts of a dramatic literary, musical, or audiovisual works

- ❑ Displays of other works, such as images, in amounts similar to typical displays in face-to-face teaching

- ❑ The materials are not among those the law specifically excludes from its coverage:
  - ❑ Materials specifically marketed for classroom use for digital distance education
  - ❑ Copies I know or should know are illegal
  - ❑ Textbooks, coursepacks, electronic reserves and similar materials typically purchased individually by the students for independent review outside the classroom or class session

- ❑ If I am using an analog original, I checked before digitizing it to be sure:
  - ❑ I copied only the amount that I am authorized to transmit
  - ❑ There is no digital copy of the work available except with technological protections that prevent my using it for the class in the way the statute authorizes

Part 7. Student Support

29. How does the institution assure that distance delivery students have access to necessary student and support services (e.g., institutional information, application for admission, registration, tutoring or academic support, advising, financial aid, tuition payment, career counseling and placement, library resources, complaint processes)? How does the institution provide them information about using these services, and how does it monitor and evaluate their use of these services?

    The College has increasingly relied on electronic means to provide resources and information and to communicate with all students, prospective students, and the public. Western's web presence continues to increase as do the services provided. News and current events and information on admission, programs, courses, costs, financial aid, and academic policies are all available on the web. The majority of the library's resources are accessed through the web. Application to the College, registration for classes, and enrollment tasks such as dropping and adding classes are accomplished online through a secure portal using username and password. Course grades and unofficial transcripts are also available through the portal.

    Web-based services are complemented by email and telephone communications that, together, allow online students to attend classes totally from a distance. The low-residency programs require all students to be on campus every summer they are in the program. This allows some services to be provided face-to-face as well as electronically. This is particularly valuable in initiating and maintaining positive advisee-advisor relationships.

30. How does the institution measure and promote interactions among distance delivery students and faculty (e.g., email, online chats, discussion groups, phone or streaming audio, "office hours," cyber buddies/mentors and tutors)?

    Both the MA in Education and the MFA in Creative Writing promote interaction through use of email, discussion groups, streaming video, cyber office hours, and Skype. The type of interaction used is dependent upon the content of the curriculum. The curriculum is determined by the faculty using best practices and current research.

31. How does the institution assure that the distance delivery students it enrolls and to whom it awards credit and credentials are the same ones who did the work and achieved the institution's learning goals (student authentication)?

    Online examinations are administered within the Blackboard Learn 9.1 environment, which requires unique student login username and password.

Students in the low-residency programs sign an Academic Honor Code form and complete an honor code online interactive self-check as a prerequisite to online courses. By signing the form (outlined below) the student agrees to abide by the Academic Policies and Academic Integrity and Honor Code principles as stated in the College Catalog.

32. How does the institution protect student identity and personal information?
    Western is committed to assuring a robust, secure, up-to-date, and reliable technical infrastructure. The Blackboard Learn 9.1 site is password protected and uses SSL encryption on the entire site. All personally identifiable information is removed before dissemination of program evaluation results.

Part 8. Evaluation and Assessment

33. How does the institution assess, review, and evaluate quality in distance-delivered offerings?
    Distance delivery programs implement assessment as traditional programs do by preparing annual discipline assessment plans which are submitted to the campus Assessment Committee every other year. Discipline assessment plans include: intended learning outcomes; assessment, evaluation, and improvement results; plan for the upcoming year; and capstone experience. The plans are evaluated by the Assessment Committee and feedback is provided to the disciplines. Additionally, all faculty teaching in the two distance learning programs are evaluated the same way as the faculty members who teach in the traditional programs – online evaluation in each course, each semester.

34. How are the measures and techniques the institution uses for distance-delivered offerings equivalent to those used to assess and evaluate traditional offerings? If there are differences, why are these differences appropriate?
    Traditional programs and distance-delivered offerings are evaluated through an online system of course evaluations. Distance offerings in the MFA in Creative Writing are different in that they ask specific questions as a means to provide additional assessment data for the course, but also relate to the online system and instructor effectiveness.

    Assessment of distance-delivery programs are similar to what is done for traditional programs. The MFA in Creative Writing is on the same assessment and program review cycle as all other disciplines on campus. The MA in Education is run through the same assessment as the undergraduate program. However due to the nature of K-12 education and their accountability at the state level, Western uses the same reporting as the state to assess and evaluate the education programs on campus.

35. How does the institution assess the learning of the students it educates in its distance-delivered offerings to ensure that they achieve the levels of performance that the institution expects and that its stakeholders require?
    Distance delivery students are assessed in the same manner as traditional students through the discipline assessment plan process. On the Western campus each discipline, regardless of instructional delivery method, prepares a discipline plan every two years. This plan discusses goals and outcomes for the respective program and student performance regarding those goals and outcomes. These plans are reviewed by the Assessment Committee which is made up of faculty from a variety of disciplines on campus. The Assessment Committee provides feedback for the discipline faculty which is then used in the next assessment cycle. Additionally, each discipline undergoes a 'program review' every six years, which includes a review by an external consultant.

36. How does the institution encourage and ensure continuous improvement of its distance-delivered offerings?
    Distance delivery courses are continuously monitored by the faculty and program directors for updates through regular assessment and program review. This is described in question #34 above. Distance programs are assessed and evaluated in the same way as all other programs on campus. Consequently, there is a continuous feedback loop on programs, classes, and faculty, and allows adjustments and improvements to be made as necessary.

Questions? E-mail changerequests@hlcommission.org or call 800.621.7440 ext. 137 or 139