



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Academic Officers

FROM: Jim Purcell, EdD

Executive Director, Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE)

RE: COVID-19 Guidance on Academic Coursework

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education has been closely monitoring the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), along with its impacts on public higher education. As you know, the first case in Alabama was confirmed today in Montgomery. Over the past week, we have received numerous notifications and questions regarding delivery of academic coursework, and this memorandum is intended to provide some guidance as you all continue to respond to the evolving situation on your campuses. Additional information can be found at ache.edu under COVID-19 Announcements.

Distance Learning

In order to prevent the spread of the virus, many institutions have decided to move all academic instruction to online delivery. As you may know, ACHE's current [Policy on Distance Education](#) requires institutions to inform the Commission prior to implementing existing programs as distance education. Given the emergent situation, ACHE is temporarily suspending the prior notification requirement for coursework offered during the Spring 2020 term. Instead, we are encouraging institutions to follow their emergency action plans for instruction, which may include shifting some or all instruction to online platforms. ACHE will compile a list of online offerings for notification at the Commission meeting on June 12, 2020. If your institution decides to shift instruction online, please send notification to Dr. Robin McGill, Director of Instruction and Special Projects (robin.mcgill@ache.edu). Institutions may need to send notification to their accrediting boards as well. Additional guidance is available from the US Department of Education: <https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>

Suspension of Instruction

Several institutions have decided to suspend instruction for a period of time or for the rest of the term. While ACHE does not have a related policy, institutions will need to comply with guidance given by their regional and specialized accreditors around length of academic year and sufficient hours of instruction. Please be advised that suspending instruction may have

implications for student financial aid and other services that are linked with total instructional hours. The US Department of Education provides some guidance about reductions to the academic year: <https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>. Again, please notify Dr. Robin McGill (robin.mcgill@ache.edu) of any plans to shorten the academic year in response to the crisis.

Additional Recommendations

Institutions may also want to consider flexibility to some academic policies, while remaining mindful of any potential impacts for student financial aid flexibility:

- Policies on granting course extensions/incompletes and deadlines for incompletes to be resolved
- Withdrawal and refund policies
- Substitution of credit-bearing courses for credit-bearing experiential programs (i.e., study-abroad programs)
- Policies on transfer credit and residency requirements

Please refer to ache.edu for updates and additional resources. ACHE encourages institutions to keep us informed and reach out with any questions.