

October 13, 2000

TO: Presidents  
Instructional Administrators  
Student Services Directors  
Registrars  
LRC Directors

FROM: Edith Lang, Program Coordinator for Math, Science and Developmental  
Education  
Todd Parker, Interim Director, Program Audit Services Section

SUBJECT: Distance Education Skills Lab Activities

The following procedures allow for the reporting of student contact hours for distance education skills lab activities. These procedures were recommended by the distance learning committee and are to be effective for a pilot project of one year, beginning with the Fall 2000 semester. They require no changes to the current General Statutes or the Administrative Code, and will allow colleges to experiment with different methods of delivery in an area traditionally reported based on student attendance in traditional skills labs. Long-term solutions to issues related to distance education skills labs will be recommended based on a larger study of such programs across the system. Prison classes are exempt from these studies and procedures since current general statutes mandate that they be reported based on actual contact hours.

Distance education instruction in skills labs may be categorized as either synchronous or asynchronous, depending on delivery format. These are described below:

- ***Synchronous***

Membership hours for any synchronous instruction should be reported based on actual contact hours logged by the student. For example, a skills lab in which an instructor leads live chat rooms with students participating by logging in and receiving assistance should be reported based on actual time that the student is logged in to the session. There must be a paid skills lab instructor participating in order for the hours to be reported for budget FTE.

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- ***Asynchronous.***

For asynchronous instruction provided such as via email, a set time should be recorded for each contact which will be determined by computing an average contact time for each program area. For example, the average contact time in a math skills lab might be approximately one hour. Therefore, for each math contact made through asynchronous distance education technology one contact hour will be reported. An individual contact is defined as a specific question and any correspondence related to that question. Multiple emails may be necessary to adequately answer a student's question, and each email does not constitute a separate contact for reporting purposes. A new contact with a student begins when a new, unrelated question is asked. A minimum of two components make up the contact to be reported: (1) the initial student contact with the question or problem and (2) the skills lab's response. For the purposes of this pilot study, documentation of contacts such as copies of emails must be maintained to document separate contacts. This documentation should include the objectives addressed by the contact.

Colleges should contact Edith Lang indicating courses for which distance education skills labs will be offered. Since fall semester is currently underway, colleges may begin to offer distance education skills labs by recording student contacts as described above. The System Office, prior to the reporting deadline for the current fall semester, will provide an average contact time for specific program areas.

Title 23 NCAC 2D.0323(d) defines skills laboratories and lists the necessary criteria for reporting students and maintaining audit documentation. In addition, detailed documentation of student contacts must be maintained. Such contacts will be the basis for reporting student contact hours for labs involving asynchronous delivery as described above. Contracts for instructors in skills labs using distance education technology should reference provisions for supervising these labs. Instructor referrals to the skills lab may be made electronically from the email address used for college correspondence. Documentation of the referral must be maintained by the skills lab for audit purposes.

Colleges with questions concerning these procedures should contact either Edith Lang or Todd Parker at the System Office at (919) 733-7051.