



The History Of Distance Education Certification Standards

PREFACE

The Standards presented here are the result of years of work by the Association of Real Estate License Law Officials (ARELLO®), which has for decades concerned itself with quality issues in education. These Standards were designed to be applicable for courses in multiple industries.

While ARELLO® maintains standards for the real estate industry, the International Distance Education Certification Center (IDECC®) was formed in 2001 to help other industry regulatory groups apply the same universal distance education standards to courses taught in their particular jurisdiction.

With the growth of distance education in the 1990s, the Association began to focus on issues relating to quality matters in distance education. After extensive research and work with distance education professionals, the Association launched the first edition of standards for distance education in 1998. Since that time, scores of courses have gone through a rigorous standards review process leading to courses *certified* for distance education design and delivery. The Standards and the certification process have been refined and continuously updated to meet the challenges and the changes in distance education.

The Standards presented here have been applied to virtually all delivery methods of distance education. The focus of the certification process is on the design and delivery and not course content. These Standards ensure that the design of the course is predicated on sound educational principles.

The ARELLO® Standards and the review process are overseen and governed by a separate Education Certification Committee within the association. The ARELLO® Education Certification Committee sets policies and procedures and establishes an independent review process to ensure that all distance education courses are examined objectively.

Background to the Standards

ARELLO® is an organization comprised of real estate regulatory officials from the United States, Canada, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Middle East. The primary purpose of the Association is to promote better administration and enforcement of licensing and regulatory laws in member jurisdictions. The major task of ARELLO® is to equip its members to fulfill their roles as regulators to properly administer licensing laws that serve to protect the public interests.

One of the primary ways that consumer interests are protected is through appropriately educating licensees. To ensure this end, regulatory agencies must assess and approve a

variety of educational offerings. These courses are offered through both traditional classrooms and distance education formats. As technological advances were made, distance education offerings increased in number and variety. It became apparent that a need existed to identify criteria that could be used to assess certain components of these courses and programs. The fact that learners and instructors are separated by distance, and sometimes by time, gave rise to concerns that may not exist with traditional classroom courses.

ARELLO® recognized the need to establish standards that can be used to review and approve distance-learning courses in the mid-1990s. At its meeting held in May 1997, the Board of Directors officially took action and approved the formation of a task force and the hiring of a consultant/expert in the distance education field. It was decided that the task force would be composed of the Chair of the Education and Standards Committee, Grace Berger from Montana; the Chair of the White Paper Subcommittee on Distance Learning, Teresa Hoffman from Nebraska; the Chair of the Technology Task Force, Pat Anderson from Alabama; and the ARELLO® President, Robert Fawcett from Vancouver, British Columbia.

David Moore, from the University of British Columbia, was added to the working group. David Moore was active in distance education at the University of British Columbia, where much emphasis was being concentrated on distance education in real estate. A second addition to the task force was Dr. Robert Meyer, Fulbright Scholar in Distance Education, who brought years of expertise in educational course design, the technologies, and distance education. The first work of the task force was to identify the issues that must be addressed by the Standards. The real estate regulators who attended the June 1997 Real Estate Educators Association (REEA) Conference met in a working session and established an outline of the issues. The standards contained in this document are a direct result of their input and are, therefore, representative of issues faced by a broad spectrum of real estate regulators.

The Standards Task Force Founding Members

Patricia Anderson (Alabama Real Estate Commission)

Grace Berger (Montana Board of Realty Regulation)

Robert Fawcett (Real Estate Council of British Columbia).

Teresa Hoffman (Nebraska Real Estate Commission)

David Moore (Real Estate Division of the Faculty of Commerce at the University of British Columbia)

Robert A. Meyer, Ph.D. (Deceased)

2013 – 2014 Revision Taskforce Members

Ryan Adair (Alabama Real Estate Commission)

Andrea S. Alford (Arkansas Real Estate Commission)

Gail Anderson (Nevada Real Estate Division)

MiChell Bird (Idaho Real Estate Commission).

Nedka P. Dineva, PhD (West Virginia Real Estate Commission)

Patricia Anderson & Teresa Hoffman reprised their roles during the revision of these Standards in 2013–2014. Teresa Hoffman was then associated with the Alabama Real Estate Commission.

IDECC and New Industries

The ARELLO® Education Certification Committee works diligently with regulatory groups from different industries who adopt the ARELLO® Standards and use the Certification Program to help provide guidance on important distance education issues within each of the industries.

WHY STANDARDS?

Distance education certainly is not new to education, but the Internet has brought increased emphasis to this educational format. We are seeing more research and interest focused on distance education. The term itself has come under scrutiny as professionals struggle to add new meaning to the terminology itself. As technology changes we are seeing new applications to delivery systems and new possibilities for virtual learning and the virtual classroom. These standards were developed to remain vital while meeting the new challenges that distance delivery and distance education face. Just as distance education has, and is, changing to keep pace with technological changes, so too have these standards changed and evolved. These standards represent years of work in research, development and application. They reflect a sound approach recognizing new advances in quality distance education design and delivery.

What is Distance Learning Education?

There is a constant flow of terminology relating to distance education. Much of this new terminology is a reflection of changes in technology, with individuals and groups eager to claim a new acronym. The basics of distance education still apply and are the underpinning of much of the terminology hype we hear and read about. Broadly defined, distance education occurs when the learner and instructor are separated by distance and sometimes by time. For the purposes of these Standards, we will continue to use the term "distance education." It is, however, acknowledged that there are a variety of terms.

While there are some educators today who argue that education is still basically the same as it has been for centuries, most will admit that delivery systems are evolving and changing. Technologies are making it possible to provide a variety of distance learning opportunities while at the same time improving the quality of education. What is important to understand is that today there are a variety of educational approaches that can be used to deliver instruction. Surveys and studies have revealed that education is currently delivered by a combination of formats and technologies: print; video technologies, audio technologies, and computer and telecommunication systems.

It appears the driving forces behind the increased use of varied formats for the delivery of instruction are fundamental changes in society combined with continued rapid technological change. With portable technology, society has become increasingly connected, impacting the learning environment. The Internet, combined with market demands, is changing the way we work, live, and learn. Older technologies are being combined with the new. We find educational delivery in a variety of modes, utilizing a variety of systems. The definition of distance education, and what it includes, continues to evolve and change.

Standards, Amid Change

The challenge we continue to face in distance education is responding to new and changing technologies and definitions. This situation is made more complex when we combine technologies. Various associations and agencies continue to struggle with standards and the accreditation process for education courses and programs that involve distance delivery. What has emerged is a realization by many that we must approach accreditation and standards in a different way.

Distance education has certain unique general characteristics. We understand that the roles of the learners and the instructors, as well as the environment itself, need to be viewed and understood differently from the traditional classroom. In that respect, we know that we must view standards for distance education within a "distance-learning context." We have realized that "interactivity" is a key part of a distance education environment. We have learned that distance education must include definitions of terms and technologies. We know that we must not lose sight of the fact that distance education must be grounded in solid educational goals and objectives. Perhaps the most important realizations are that distance education

standards must be established within a framework and that evaluation is a process. Even though program specifics, course specifics, and delivery modes may vary widely from situation to situation, the evaluation process allows an individual educational entity to evaluate its efforts. These standards use a process that is commonly called a program or course review self-study. A self-study helps determine if a provider is delivering sound educational material that meets the needs of the educational provider and the learner.

Educational standards must be applied within a review process framework; yet, the flexibility allowed by a process should not lead to lower criteria. When the educational goals and objectives are stated, the educational provider must explain how the program and courses meet established goals. Distance education standards force providers to look at the parts within the broader context of goals, content, and varied technologies.

Curricula, Courses, and Distance Delivery

The heart of any distance education program is high quality course and curriculum design. The courses must meet the needs of the learners who are remote from their instructor in whole or part. We view distance education more in terms of instructional strategies. We emphasize that distance education efforts must never forget the key word, *distance*. In most distance

education courses, the instructors and the learners are separated from each other. We know that this is often considerably different than the teacher in the classroom. Actually, one of the first questions one must ask in considering distance education is why? Why do we want to do this? Then ask "how?" How are we going to deliver the material remotely? Or put another way, what will be our instructional strategy?

The why and how issues are meant to underscore that effective distance education requires much planning to determine the most appropriate distance delivery strategy. Content area goals and objectives must be viewed from the perspective of, "How will any technologies used become part of the strategies to the goals?" If, for example, the overall goal is to teach sales techniques, and the strategy is to use the Internet as a delivery mode, much planning will need to take place. In such an example, good planning would raise several questions. The basic one would be: "Is the Internet the appropriate distance delivery strategy for such a course?"

A second important issue in distance education curriculum design revolves around the support needed for any technologies chosen. Many of the technologies available today are powerful, but complex. Many of these require continuous technological support. Such support can quickly translate into additional staff or larger operational budgets. In addition, instructors involved in distance education must be knowledgeable in any technology chosen. Instructors, who sometimes are eager to use newer technologies in distance education, often become frustrated with integrating them into their instruction. Educational providers must realize that

instructors need training in the use of the distance delivery modes chosen. Instructors, who are used to traditional classrooms, often find that instruction requires more advanced planning. It is often more difficult, if not impossible, to change to a teaching alternative "on-the-fly." Instructors utilizing distance-learning tools must develop and integrate a variety of well-planned teaching strategies.

A third consideration, or issue, is the topic of evaluation, which presents some new challenges in distance education. Course formative feedback is generally available in the traditional classroom in a variety of forms. Instructors commonly use periodic evaluations, such as tests and quizzes. Informal cues from learners' expressions can give continuous feedback to instructors. Such cues do not always exist in distance learning formats. Hence, formative evaluation in distance education often is not as easy as in the traditional classroom. Periodic feedback points and the methods used must be carefully planned and incorporated into any course or series of courses. Related to evaluation are the topics of academic integrity and security. These are discussed later in the section entitled, "Learner Grading and Evaluation."

Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Those in distance education have sought ways to classify distance education to better understand the needs of instructors and learners. Two major approaches are utilized: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning occurs when the interaction between the instructor and learner is simultaneous or in real time (Distance Education and Training Council Accreditation Handbook, 2013, page 5). The learners meet in certain locations and sometimes in specific locations, depending upon the technology being used. Such instruction is time-bound and not always place-bound. The following are the main points to consider in synchronous distance education delivery:

- Course development is more time-consuming than traditional classroom courses
- Once an instructor has taught a course in this format, the amount of preparation and support required is similar to that of a traditional class
- Technical support is required
- Learners require at least the same support from the instructor as regular traditional classroom Learners
- Learners often need additional means to communicate with an instructor one-on-one
- Learners need some mechanism to send and receive documents

Asynchronous learning occurs when interaction between the instructor and learner is non-

simultaneous or takes place at different times (Distance Education and Training Council Accreditation Handbook, 2013, page 5). It can be from any place at any time, as chosen by the individual Learners and the instructor. There are generally not fixed times or locations. Learners often do not physically go to the educational provider to use the facilities or may go there only to take exams. Major factors to consider in asynchronous distance education delivery include:

- Learners do not come to a classroom or do so infrequently
- All work of Learners and instructors may be done outside of a classroom
- The conversion of material from a classroom format to asynchronous learning requires an entire redesign of the course
- The development and support required for asynchronous courses is often extensive and on-going
- Monitoring of learner feedback must be frequent and routine
- This is the most flexible distance delivery approach

Many distance education courses combine synchronous and asynchronous approaches. The learner may meet sometimes in synchronous modes and at other times utilize various asynchronous teaching methods.

Training of Instructors

When viewing distance education within the standards context, it is important to examine what role education and training has played in the development of courses and programs. Historically, much of what instructors need to know to be effective in the delivery of distance education has not been taught in formal educational programs in the academic world. The IDECC® Certified Distance Education Instructor (CDEI™) certification program is aimed at teaching distance education fundamentals and techniques to instructors who teach distance education courses. Using trained and qualified instructors in both content and delivery of a course is an important factor in effective and efficient distance education.

The more experience and training that instructors receive in distance education methods, the more effective that distance education tends to be. Effectiveness of instructors in distance education can be enhanced in a variety of ways, such as:

- Participating in the planning process
- Observing ongoing classes deemed to be good examples
- Training by an experienced instructor in the delivery modes utilized
- Completing academic classes in distance education
- Learning proficiency in the use of any equipment or technologies utilized in the distance education modes

- Gaining an understanding of the techniques believed to be effective in distance education, such as discussion groups, group projects, one-to-one feedback, and instructor access
- Experiencing a course as a distance learner

Such training and enhancements help provide instructors background and techniques in Learner evaluation, course and program design and evaluation, and Learner support systems. It should be noted that distance education often takes more preparation on the part of instructors than traditional education. Leadership skills, creativity, and time management skills on the part of the instructors are desirable. There are many courses and resources for instructors to learn the important aspects of distance education. Course and program evaluation by the learners provides measures for instructors and administrators to use in determining if the teaching is effective.

Interactivity

Distance education operates on the premise that because the learner is at a distance, more attention should be devoted to how the Learner interacts with the instructor and the material. In general, correspondence courses have been historically criticized for the lack of much Learner and teacher interaction. Contemporary distance education places much emphasis on interactivity.

Higher levels of interaction enhance learning when the instructor and the Learner are separated by distance. There is growing evidence that Learner performance is better when Learners perceive that there are higher levels of interaction. John Keller's Model of Motivational Design known as ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) is an example of learning strategies used to help the interaction or the perceived levels of interaction by learners.

There are three distinct but closely related types of interaction. They are Learner-instructor, Learner-Learner, and Learner-content. Each type of interaction is significant to the learning process. Various distance education delivery media utilize these types of interaction to varying degrees. While Learners overwhelmingly appreciate the access these distance education courses provide, they also appear to need an adjustment period to get used to the unique aspects of interaction within this distance education.

Learner Support Services

It is important that learners have the same access to Learner services whether they enroll in a course delivered in a traditional classroom or through distance education. Courses delivered by technology require instructors and providers to take some additional measures to ensure these services. In practice, while some Learners may be more adept at using the

technologies, they still require thorough orientation sessions and the other support services learners need to successfully complete a course.

The design of the instruction affects the level of support services in distance education. Because there is so much flexibility in how the courses are designed, it is extremely important that Learner support services be well planned and thorough in order for learners to successfully complete the course.

These Standards Have Proven Successful

ARELLO® Standards have been applied to scores of courses throughout the United States and internationally. These Standards have proven valuable in many aspects. Providers have given testimony that applying the Standards has improved their education programs. Learners have benefitted by experiencing a higher quality education offering. As a result, the public encounters a more qualified practitioner. The unique aspect of these Standards is that they are in themselves flexible while all encompassing. The Standards are well rooted in sound educational theory and cognizant of the distance education approaches, tools, and technologies. The Standards consider all of the important elements of a distance education course, including design, delivery, approach, Learner services, evaluation techniques, and commitment to the endeavor. Courses are reviewed, analyzed, critiqued, and "road-tested." The certification process is well designed, detailed, and thorough. These Standards were the first standards to be developed for distance education courses and remain a leader in distance education course certification. The Standards and the process continue to be refined and improved and have become respected by educational providers and regulatory agencies.