

## ARC/STSA Distance Education Policy

### Relevant Standards: Standards I - V

#### Purpose

The ARC/STSA Distance Education Policy:

- \* Aligns with CAAHEP's Policy 209 - Instructional Modalities.
- \* Outlines the criteria acceptable to the ARC/STSA for Standards compliance when utilizing distance education methodology.
- \* Delineates when programs utilizing distance education methodology must apply for a distance education approval.

#### Distance Education Definition

[Based upon the United States Department of Education (USDE) definition]

Education using one or more of the technologies listed below 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.

Technologies used to deliver distance education 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. audioconferencing; or,
4. media, such as audio or video recordings, if used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above in 1 - 3.

For purposes of this definition:

An instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established within the CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Technology or the current CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Assisting.

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and timely assessment; consistent with the content under discussion, and includes at least two of the following:

1. providing direct instruction; assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;

2. providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
3. facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or,
4. other instructional activities approved by the ARC/STSA in conjunction with CAAHEP.

An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency:

1. providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and,
2. monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed, based on such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

*\*Instruction refers to the delivery of didactic and laboratory coursework led by qualified instructors per the current CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Technology and current CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Assisting. Clinical activities are considered supervised practice and separate from didactic and laboratory instructional modalities.*

*CAAHEP and ARC/STSA follow the federal definition that correspondence education is not distance education, as correspondence instruction is limited, not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. The ARC/STSA does not approve correspondence education within its programs.*

### **Distance Education Application Process**

Currently accredited programs must be in good standing with CAAHEP and the ARC/STSA to apply for distance education approval. Initial applicant programs with current distance education offerings may apply for distance education approval in conjunction with their Self-Study Report.

Distance education offerings must be equivalent to that of a traditional campus-based education in all aspects of the curriculum and academic rigor. Surgical Technology programs must offer on-ground/in-person laboratory skills courses.

A distance education application and site evaluation are required for:

1. CAAHEP-accredited programs that initiate distance education for any portion of the required core curriculum, after January 1, 2024. For surgical technology, this includes content under the learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for

- Surgical Technology; and for surgical assisting programs, this includes content under the learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for Surgical Assisting.
2. Programs applying for initial accreditation that currently offer any portion of the required core curriculum using distance education at the time of their application. For surgical technology, this includes content under learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for Surgical Technology; and for surgical assisting programs, this includes content under the learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for Surgical Assisting.

A distance education application is not required for:

3. CAAHEP-accredited programs that offered any portion of the required core curriculum using distance education, prior to January 1, 2024. For surgical technology, this includes content under learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for Surgical Technology; and for surgical assisting programs, this includes content under the learning objectives outlined in the current Core Curriculum for Surgical Assisting.

### **Distance Education Evaluation Criteria**

**All institutional sponsors/programs offering any portion of the required surgical technology or surgical assisting core curriculum content through distance education must evidence compliance with the distance education requirements listed below, in addition to the current CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Technology or the current CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Surgical Assisting, as applicable. Evidence of such compliance, including a completed ARC/STSA Curriculum Comparison Map, must be maintained by the institution.**

#### **Standard I**

- Secure and maintain distance education delivery approval(s) from institutional accreditor, state agency (agencies) and/or NC-SARA, as applicable.
- Demonstrate an institutional commitment to administrative oversight and support of the instructional modality.
- Maintain infrastructure to effectively deliver distance education learning materials and to safeguard against short and long-term data loss. Include provisions within required preparedness plans for continuity of distance education learning in the event of an unanticipated interruption.

#### **Standard II**

- Assure that student learning through the distance education modality is consistent with the mission, goals, and objectives of the program.
- Review distance education modality with the Program Advisory Committee, to include a representative who is knowledgeable in distance education practices.

#### **Standard III**

- Implement a process to uphold academic integrity and honesty consistent with institutional policy including an authentication process for verification of student

identity.

- Maintain sufficient information technology resources for teaching and learning, and a strategic plan for sustainability.
- Provide technical support for students and faculty (*see Standard V regarding disclosure*).
- Demonstrate that an individual(s) with experience and competency in distance education instructional design contributes to the curriculum development of distance education courses.
- Provide students with orientation to/instruction on the use of the distance education delivery system (learning management system).
- Ensure students and faculty have access to library resources/instructional material.
- Provide professional development and training on distance education delivery, including a distance education orientation and regular professional development on new innovations in instructional methods and delivery platforms, to all faculty with distance education instructional responsibilities.
- Evidence that the distance education curriculum includes regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students, and among students.
- Assess faculty on their knowledge of and effectiveness in delivery of distance education within the program's regular/periodic teaching evaluations. The assessment of distance education faculty must be performed by, or with the assistance of, an individual trained and/or experienced in evaluating effectiveness of distance education instruction.

#### Standard III/IV

- Evidence that faculty monitors student academic progress and provides regular and timely assessment as detailed in Standard IV.
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of the delivery method to ensure that course and program objectives are being met. Analyze the results of the recurrent evaluation of students, as detailed in Standard IV, to ensure the effectiveness of the delivery method.
- Assure a level of academic rigor, objectives, and competencies to meet outcomes thresholds.

#### Standard V

- Disclose to applicants and students, in writing, the information technology requirements for the program and resources to support students in meeting the program delivery method and outcomes.
- Publish technical support schedule of availability for students and faculty and how to access this support.