

Advisory: Revised Guidance on the Approval of Programs Involving Online Courses Offered in Another State

August 9, 2018

Background: Some institutions offer programs of education that require students to complete courses independent study (distance learning) in addition to taking in-residence courses. As several institutions have multiple campuses in multiple states, it is possible that the in-residence courses and the distance learning courses are offered by different campuses. On April 30, 2012, Education Service issued guidance on the approval of programs involving online courses offered in another state.

Issue: The advisory issued in 2012 stated that State Approving Agencies (SAAs) can approve such programs, and VA should accept such approvals, but the guidance was not clear as to whether or not VA is of the opinion that SAAs should approve such programs.

Question: Can an SAA approve a program of education at a campus if the distance learning courses required for completion of the program are offered by a campus in a different state?

Answer: SAAs have the authority to approve a program of education offered by an institution in their jurisdiction. If all of the courses required for completion of the program of education are not offered by a single campus of the institution, the SAA must ensure that all courses required for completion of the program are offered at a branch of the institution that has programs approved for VA education benefits.

Example: VA Private University has three campuses – one in Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and New York. The Mississippi SAA is reviewing a request for approval of a program of education. Students enrolled in the program of education must take the core courses via distance learning. The distance learning courses are offered by the Pennsylvania campus. The Mississippi SAA may approve the program of education after verifying that the required courses offered by the Pennsylvania campus are in programs approved for VA education benefits.

VA does not view the fact that some of the courses required for completion of a program of education are provided through distance learning courses offered by the same institution as sufficient grounds for denying or withdrawing approval for GI Bill benefits, notwithstanding the fact that the additional distance learning courses (including a majority of courses) are offered by a campus in a different state.

This advisory is a liberalization of the current restrictions against the combination of programs found at 38 C.F.R. § 21.4266(e). However, this advisory's liberalization of that section only applies to in-residence courses combined with distance learning courses offered by the same institution. This advisory is not a repeal of § 21.4266(e).

Procedures: Education Liaison Representatives should accept the approval of these programs of education if the SAA submitting the approval has verified that the campus outside of the SAA's jurisdiction offers programs of education approved for VA education benefits. The campus with the approved program may certify all courses required for the program (including those taken by distance learning), or the other campus may certify the distance learning courses to VA as a guest student. In either case, the type hours (resident or distance learning) certified for the student must accurately reflect the type training being pursued.

Rescission: This guidance replaces the advisory issued on April 30, 2012, which is hereby rescinded.

Questions: If you have any questions, please direct them to the Policy & Regulations Development Team via email at VAVBAWAS/CO/225C.

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