



ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

Outcomes | Innovation | Improvement

**[ACCJC Enhances Support for Quality in Distance Education
as Online Enrollment Soars Post-COVID](#)**

November 21, 2024

The explosion of distance education following the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the focus of policymakers, accreditors, and federal stakeholders on maintaining and enhancing quality in online learning. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has observed a remarkable increase in online course offerings over the past five years. Today, more than 77% of ACCJC's 2.2 million students are enrolled in at least one online course.

This expansion of online education has been matched by an increase in federal financial support through grants, scholarships, and financial aid programs. Federal regulations require that faculty maintain regular and substantive interaction with students—a complex mandate that, if unmet, can have serious consequences. Institutions risk losing access to federal aid if audits by the U.S. Department of Education or its Office of Inspector General reveal non-compliance. Historical precedents show that institutions may be required to repay federal aid if students were found not to receive instruction that meets these standards.

In response, ACCJC has developed a suite of resources designed to help institutions uphold and demonstrate quality in their distance education programs. These tools are also intended to assist peer reviewers during the accreditation process, ensuring a rigorous yet supportive review experience.

ACCJC's available resources include:

1. [Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education](#)
2. [Addendum to the Protocol for Distance Education Review](#)
3. [DE Assessment Tool for Peer Reviewers](#)
4. [Frequently Asked Questions for institutions and peer reviewers involved in distance education evaluations](#)

These resources, which can be accessed on the ACCJC website and in the [Accreditation Handbook](#), are instrumental in helping institutions meet the standards set forth in ACCJC's [Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education](#). This policy, in alignment with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.3, mandates that accredited institutions maintain equivalent quality, accountability, and outcomes across all delivery modes.

To further support faculty, staff, and administrators, ACCJC has collaborated with peer reviewers to develop the Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education. This rubric not only clarifies the minimum requirements for regular and substantive interaction but also highlights best practices for excellence in online teaching.

For more information about ACCJC's commitment to distance education quality and access to these resources, please visit <https://accjc.org/accreditation-handbook-and-report-templates/>.

To ensure you receive all of ACCJC's important communications, please complete the brief [ACCJC Sign-Up Form](#).