

Indiana University  
Office of Online Education and  
University Student Services and Systems

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**Definitions of Distance Education  
[Courses, Programs and Students]  
for SIS Coding and Compliance Review  
and Reporting Credit Hour Allocations**

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## Overview

This document outlines requirements for the coding of distance education classes, programs, and students in Indiana University's Student Information System. **The correct coding of online classes is required for federal and state reporting, correct bursar billing of tuition and fees, accreditation, international student tracking, and veteran's services benefits processing. Failure to properly code classes results in non-compliance with federal Title IV financial aid regulations, which can result in substantial penalties to IU.**

The document provides an appropriate coding structure for reporting of online classes, programs, and students, as implemented in the Fall 2013 schedule of classes and program build process, effective November 2012.

## Review of Definitions

This section explains the definitions of distance education that are used by regulatory agencies and university administration to track distance education classes, programs, and students, and to ensure Indiana University's compliance with federal regulations, accreditation standards, and university policies.

### **Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)**

IPEDS is the data system required by the United States Congress for use by the United States Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics.

#### **Distance Education**

Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used for instruction may include the following: Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; and videocassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.

- Distance Education Course: A course in which the instructional content is delivered exclusively via distance education.
- Distance Education Program: A program for which the required coursework for program completion is able to be completed via distance education courses.

#### **Correspondence Education**

Education provided through one or more courses in which the institution provides instructional materials and examinations by mail or electronic transmission to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and substantive, and it is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education.

Retrieved from: <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/public/glossary>

## Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

The Higher Learning Commission defines a **distance-delivered course** as one in which at least **75% of the instruction** and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other. A **distance-delivered program** is a certificate or degree program in which **50% or more of the required courses** may be taken as distance-delivered courses.

The HLC defines **correspondence education** as education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education.

To determine whether a program is offered via distance education, take the number of distance education courses in the educational program divided by the total number of courses in that particular program. If the resulting percentage indicates that 50% or more of the program is offered by distance education, you should list the program as such. If the program has a combination of distance and correspondence education courses that together add up to 50% or more, then list the program in the category that represents the largest percentage.

Special note:

- Institutions must properly distinguish its distance and correspondence education using the federal definitions. **The key distinction in the federal definition is whether the courses are self-paced and the interaction with faculty is student-initiated.** Courses of this nature are correspondence education regardless of whether they are delivered electronically or through any other mechanism. The U.S. Department of Education has informed the HLC that it is looking closely at whether institutions have properly made this identification that there may be Title IV consequences for institutions that have not properly made this identification.

Retrieved from <https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html>

## Indiana Commission Higher Education (ICHE)

Definitions for distance education courses and programs used by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education follow the Sloan consortium definitions for distance education courses and programs:

- Distance education **course** = **80% or more of the content** in a course is delivered via distance.
- Distance education **program** = **80% of requirements to meet the degree/credential** are offered via distance.

Sloan Consortium Source: <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/goingthedistance.pdf>

# Compliance Issues

## Federal Title IV Regulations

In order to be eligible for Federal Student Aid (FSA), Indiana University must be in compliance with federal Title IV regulations. Given the federal source of both Title IV regulations and IPEDS, the Title IV definitions for distance education are very similar to IPEDS definitions.

### Distance Education

A distance education program at a domestic school is considered an eligible FSA program if it has been accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Department for accreditation of distance education. It is not subject to the rules that apply to correspondence coursework, which are discussed in the next section.

Distance education means education that uses certain technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor, and to support **regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor**. The interaction may be synchronous (student and instructor are in communication at the same time) or asynchronous. The technologies may include

- Internet,
- audio conferencing, or
- one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices.

A course taught through video cassettes or discs is also considered a distance education course but only if one of the three technologies listed is used to support interaction between the students and the instructor.

### Correspondence courses

Unlike distance education courses, which are now treated in the same way as all other eligible programs, **some restrictions apply to correspondence courses**. A correspondence course is a home-study course provided by a school under which the school provides instructional materials, including examinations on the materials, to students who are not physically attending classes at the school. **Interaction between instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student**. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. When a student completes a portion of the instructional materials, the student takes the examinations that relate to that portion of the materials and returns the examinations to the school for grading.

- If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the course is considered to be a correspondence course.
- If a school adds telecommunications technology, such as electronic delivery of course materials or an online discussion board, to a correspondence course, the school must ascertain the predominant method of instruction (correspondence or telecommunications),

keeping in mind that a telecommunications course must use technology to support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. The school must apply the rules for the predominant method in administering its participation in the FSA programs.

- A course that is delivered in whole or in part through the use of video cassettes or video discs is a correspondence course unless the school also delivers comparable instruction to students attending resident classes at the school during the same award year.

**If a school offers more than 50% of its courses by correspondence or if 50% or more of its students are enrolled in its correspondence courses, the school loses its eligibility to participate in the FSA programs.**

**Correspondence students enrolled in certificate programs are not eligible for FSA funds.**

Retrieved from <https://ifap.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-01/1920FSAHbkVol2Ch2.pdf>

## **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

U.S. Department of Veterans affairs enrollment certification rules require that enrollment be broken out by in-residence verses distance courses. Certifying officials must know which classes will meet VA's definition of in-residence.

### **When to Certify Courses As “In-Residence” On VA Enrollment Certifications:**

For terms beginning on or after August 15, 2019, you will certify most courses which contain an in-residence component as in-residence training. “Hybrid” training, which combines residential and distance learning will be certified as in-residence when the following conditions are met:

- Hybrid training must have at least one session that meets the definition of a standard class session (i.e. one 50-minute class,) but does not have to meet weekly.
- Your school's approval must specifically include resident and distance learning to report “hybrid” courses to VA. If both modalities are approved, qualifying “hybrid” courses should be reported as “res” on the enrollment certification. (See 38 U.S.C. 3313(c)(1)(B)(iii) and 38 U.S.C. 3313(g)(3)(A)(ii)(I)(bb)).

A course that does not meet the VA definition of residence training is considered distance training. **This distinction can determine how much housing allowance a student is entitled to receive.** Indicators of instructional modality in the schedule of classes or other sources must be consistent and reliable to assure compliance with VA definitions when reporting enrollment data.

Retrieved from: <https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/how-to-use-benefits/online-distance-learning/>

## **U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

Federal Department of Homeland Security regulations require institutions to ensure that an international student is primarily studying at a physical location on campus for the preponderance of their education (i.e. at least 9 credits per semester for an undergraduate must be onsite).

F-1 students in the United States must maintain a full course of study. Only one online or distance learning class can count toward a full course of study for an F-1 student during each term or semester. An online, or distance learning, course for the purpose of international student regulations means a course that is primarily offered through technology and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examinations or other purposes integral to completion of the class.

**IU should not issue SEVIS I-20's to international students for F-1 visa purposes for degree programs in which a student cannot complete the program physically onsite/on-campus.**

International Services needs clear identification of course (class) attributes to determine if a specific course section should be distance education for immigration compliance purposes. International admission offices need to know if an academic program and/or academic plan are sufficiently onsite/on- campus to be a visa eligible option for the student.

Retrieved from: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/study/full-course-of-study>

## **SIS Coding of Distance Education Classes/Credit Hour Allocations**

Indiana University will define distance education classes, and provide coding in its Student Information System, in accordance with United States Department of Education (DE) Title IV regulations and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Definitions.

**Definition: A Distance Education class is a class in which 76% - 100% of the instruction is offered by distance education.**

**Distance education** is defined as education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to *students who are separated from the instructor*, and to support *regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor*. The interaction may be synchronous (student and instructor are in communication at the same time) or asynchronous. The technologies may include

- Internet,
- Audio conferencing, or
- One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices.

A class taught through video cassettes or discs is also considered a distance education class but only if one of the three technologies listed is used to support regular interaction between the students and the instructor.

**Online education** is a term that has become synonymous with distance education, using either synchronous or asynchronous technologies:

- **Synchronous online education** is a type of online education that provides flexible access to content and instruction from any place, but at specific times. Students must be electronically present simultaneously with the instructor to receive instruction, typically delivered through live video.
- **Asynchronous online education** is a type of online education that provides flexible access to content and instruction at any time, from any place. Students do not have to be physically or electronically present simultaneously with the instructor. Instructional content is intentionally designed and delivered asynchronously to replace classroom instruction time (contact hours) between the student and instructor. *To determine what percentage of an asynchronous class is online, divide the number of classroom contact hours replaced by instruction designed and delivered online by the total number of contact hours required for the class.*

**Correspondence education** classes are home-study classes in which schools send physical instructional materials and examinations to participating students' homes, where students pace themselves through the curriculum. Interaction between the instructor and student is limited, not regular and substantive, and initiated primarily by the student. Correspondence education is not distance education.



**Coding:** To support IU reporting and provide meaningful information to students, code each class section with one of the following instruction mode codes. *Lack of compliance with these definitions by Indiana University could lead to loss of eligibility for federal funds, loss of revenue, and jeopardy for accreditation of the various IU campuses.*

**[OA] Online All:** 100% of instruction is provided entirely through asynchronous online education in which the student is not bound by place or time. No on-campus meetings are required. Any synchronous live video course activities should be optional and/or recorded for later viewing with no additional penalties or hardships for the student (e.g., having to write a paper to “make up” for missing a live video lecture).

**[OI] Online Interactive:** 76% to 99% of instruction is provided through asynchronous online education. Students are required to come to a physical campus location at least once during the semester. Like 100% online classes, any synchronous live video course activities should be optional and/or recorded for later viewing.

**[HY] Hybrid, Traditional:** 26% to 75% of the instruction is provided through asynchronous online or synchronous live video instruction. The remainder of the instruction is provided through traditional face-to-face instruction. Regular on-campus meetings are required.

**[HD] Hybrid, Distance:** 26% to 75% of the instruction is provided through asynchronous online education. The remainder of the instruction is provided by synchronous live video instruction. No on-campus meetings are required.

**[DO] Distance, Other:** 76% to 100% of the instruction is provided by synchronous live video instruction, with any remainder taught through asynchronous online instruction.

**[P] In-Person:** Traditional campus-based face-to-face instruction. Only 0% to 25% of the instruction may be offered online.

**[IN] Internship/Practica:** Internships are experiential learning experiences in a work setting, generally related to a student’s career objective. Internships must be supervised by a qualified professional at the organization where the internship is being conducted. The internship may consist of full-time or part-time work, be paid or unpaid and may be taken for credit or independently for no credit by the student for the purpose of gaining practical experience. Practica is a practical work experience in a particular field that is conducted concurrently or consecutively with educational instruction.

**[IS] Independent/Directed Study:** Classes where instructors interact individually with students through a flexible format.

**[CT] Closed Circuit TV\*:** 76% or more of the instruction is provided by synchronous Closed Circuit TV. *This is a legacy code that is no longer used.*

**[OC] Correspondence:** 75% or more of the instruction is provided by correspondence education. *This is a legacy code that is no longer used.*

The flowchart on page 11 determines the Mode of Instruction for a class. Mode of Instruction can also be found by calculating the **Online %** for a class and locating the corresponding code in the table below:

<b>Quick Reference for Instruction Mode Coding</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Online % (#Online Contact Hours / #Total Contact Hours)</b>
OA	Online All	100% is asynchronous online education
OI	Online Interactive	76% to 99% is asynchronous online education, with at least one on-campus meeting
HY	Hybrid, Traditional	26% to 75% is asynchronous online or synchronous live video, remainder is traditional face-to-face instruction with on-campus meetings
HD	Hybrid, Synchronous	26% to 75% is asynchronous online, remainder is synchronous live video
DO	Synchronous Online	76% to 100% is synchronous live video, with any remainder asynchronous online education
P	In Person (Face to Face)	Traditional face-to-face instruction, only 0% to 25% may be online education
IN	Internship	Meetings individually arranged with the instructor
IS	Independent/Directed Study	Meetings individually arranged with the instructor

**Note:**

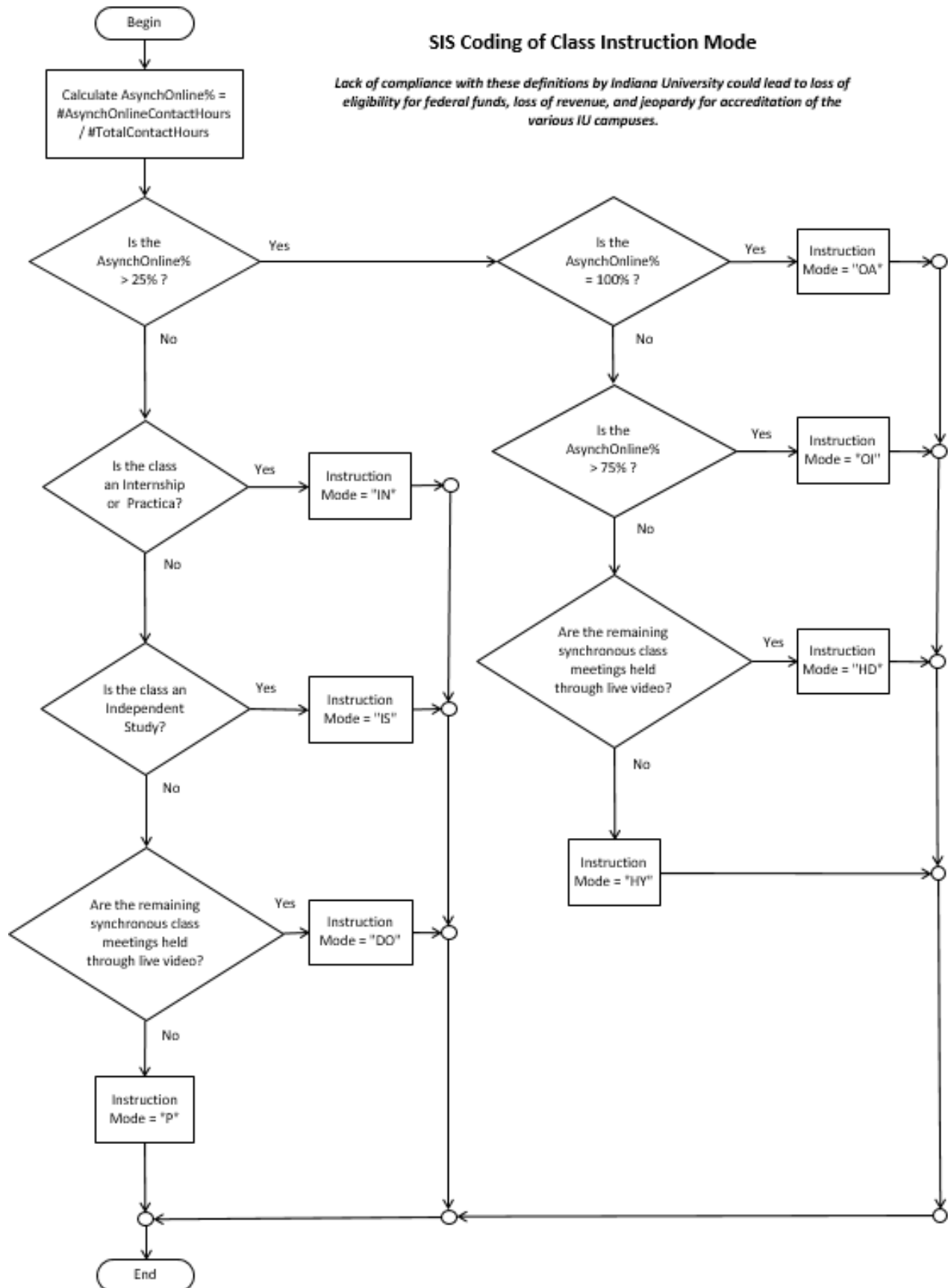
OA, OI, HD, and DO classes are all considered “online education” by University definitions, as the students and instructor are separated by distance 76% or more of the time. Most reporting for online education includes OA, OI, HD, and DO classes unless otherwise specified. These classes are of particular importance when scheduling veteran and international students who are limited in the number of distance education classes they may take.

For comparison purposes, the following table summarizes the correspondence between the course attribute values used to denote distance education classes prior to Fall 2013 and the new Instruction Mode values:

<b>Mappings from pre-Fall 2013 Course Attributes to Instruction Mode</b>	
<b>Pre-Fall 2013 Attribute Value</b>	<b>Corresponding Instruction Mode Value</b>
xxIS Independent Study	IS Independent Study
xxHY Hybrid	HY Hybrid, Traditional OR HD Hybrid, Synchronous OR OI Online Interactive
xxTV Interactive TV	CT Closed Circuit TV OR DO Synchronous Online
xxOI Online Interactive	OI Online Interactive OR OA Online All

## SIS Coding of Class Instruction Mode

*Lack of compliance with these definitions by Indiana University could lead to loss of eligibility for federal funds, loss of revenue, and jeopardy for accreditation of the various IU campuses.*



## SIS Coding of Online Education Plans

In the past, various SIS coding structures have been used to identify distance education academic plans. The current coding practice is to embed ‘DA’ (Distance Accessible) or ‘DE’ (Distance Education) into the plan code.

Plan Code	Plan Description
NRSDARNBSN	Nursing RN to BSN
COMMSDEBS	Communication Studies BS
CJUSDABS	Criminal Justice BA

This coding structure makes it difficult to extract all of the online education academic plans, since there are instances where the ‘DA’ is not a designation for Distance Accessible:

Plan Code	Plan Description
PRRADASPR	Pre Radiograph AS
AUDIOLDAUD	Audiology D Aud (Dr. Audiology)
MEDARAS	Media Arts AS

Other previously used coding structures for distance education plans include “ONL” at the beginning of the plan code and “DE” at the end:

Plan Code	Plan Description
ONLFINMBA	Finance MBA
ONLMGTMBA	Management MBA
LNGMSEDDE	Language Education MSED
ISTMSEDDE	Instructional Systems Technology

In order to select distance education academic plans, the plan name must first be dissected, and this is not always 100% accurate. Therefore, none of the current or past coding structures are ideal for easily extracting a list of distance education academic plans. While it remains critical that separate plans be used to designate Distance Education plans from their traditional, “bricks and mortar” counterparts, adding an attribute or flag to the academic plan table will solve reporting issues.

## Procedure for SIS Coding of Online Education Degree Programs

Indiana University will define online education programs, and provide coding in its Student Information System, in accordance with United States Department of Education (DE) and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) calculations.

### *Calculation for Online Education Program*

To determine whether a program is offered online:

1. Count the total number of courses required in the educational program
2. Count the number of online courses in the program (Instruction Modes = OA (Online All), OI (Online Interactive), HD (Hybrid, Distance), or DO (Distance, Other))
3. Divide the number of online education courses (#2) by the total number of courses (#1) to yield the percentage of online education offered in that program
  - a. If 80% or more of the program is offered by online education, then this constitutes an online program (see coding below)
  - b. If 50% - 79% of the program is offered by online education and required coop/internship/practica that can also be completed at a distance, then this constitutes a hybrid program (see coding below). Note: For a program to be categorized as hybrid, a minimum of 21% of the required courses must be explicitly on-campus instruction.

## SIS Coding of Online Education Degree Programs (SIS Plans)

Existing programs going online and new online programs require approval from OOE, ALC, IU Board of Trustees, and ICHE. Existing programs going hybrid and new hybrid programs required approval from OOE, ALC, and IU Board of Trustees.

- The SIS academic plan table (PS\_ACAD\_PLAN\_TBL) column IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND will be used as the distance education indicator.
- When new plans are added, the corresponding IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND will be set to one of the following values:
  - Y** – Indicates the program is 100% online
  - Y8** – Indicates the program is 80-99% online
  - Y5** – Indicates the program is 50-79% hybrid
  - N** – Indicates the program is not online or hybrid
- When programs can be successfully completed by a student either through a traditional on-campus program, or online program, create two separate plan codes with different online indicators for each.
- IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND will exist in the plan table in the data warehouse and the IUIE (Student -> Student Enrollment Services -> Control Tables -> Academic Plan).

- The online indicator will be mapped to the appropriate CIP, Term, Term Snapshot, and Cohort tables
- Any new plan codes established for a distance education plan will contain the characters “DE” just before the degree level indication (“BS”, “CRT”, “MSED”, etc.) to assist academic units and support staff with the placement of students into online vs. on-campus plans.

## **Guidance for Reporting Online Education at Indiana University**

A fully mature information system using the coding policies and processes outlined in this document will allow for the calculation of a variety of metrics related to online education. Unfortunately, clear definitions of courses and programs still leave some confusion as to exactly how to count online education students. This confusion is due to the fact that students enrolled in on-campus programs sometimes take online courses, and students enrolled in online programs may take on-campus courses,

**In order to eliminate any confusion, the questions below will be answered by all Indiana University offices using the logic given following each question.**

**How many distance/online education classes are offered?**

A count of classes where Mode of Instruction = OA, OI, HD, or DO

**How many students are enrolled in distance/online education classes?**

A count of students enrolled in classes where Mode of Instruction = OA, OI, HD, or DO

**How many asynchronous online classes are being offered?**

A count of classes where Mode of Instruction = OA or OI

**How many students are enrolled in asynchronous online classes?**

A count of students enrolled in classes where Mode of Instruction = OA or OI

**How many correspondence classes are being offered?**

A count of classes where Mode of Instruction = OC

**How many distance/online education programs are available from IU?**

A count of academic plans (grouped by plan description) where IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND = Y or Y8

**How many students are enrolled in distance education programs?**

A count of students in academic plans where IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND = Y or Y8

**How many hybrid programs are available from IU?**

A count of academic plans (grouped by plan description) where IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND = Y5

**How many students are enrolled in hybrid programs?**

A count of students in academic plans where IU\_PLAN\_ONL\_IND = Y5

## Appendix A: Document History and Revisions

A university-wide task force prepared this document in 2012. USSS and Registrar Council officially adopted the coding standards on 11/8/12. The Office of Online Education maintains the most current version of this document at

<https://teachingonline.iu.edu/doc/iuonline-term-definitions.pdf>

The Office of Online Education coordinates revisions to this document in consultation with the following:

- University Bursar
- University Registrar
- University Director of Financial Aid
- General Counsel
- Chief Policy Officer
- University Academic Affairs AVP for Budget and Finance
- Office of International Services
- Division of Student Affairs Veterans and Military Services

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### Adoption and Revision History:

- Drafted 9/17/12 by Kennedy (USSS)
- Revised 09/20/12 w/edits from Schmitz (UIRR)/Bichelmeyer (OOE)
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- Revised 10/31/12 by Bichelmeyer (OOE) w/feedback from committee
- Updated 11/5/2012 by Kennedy (USSS)
- Updated 11/8/2012 w/Registrar Council feedback, ed. by Bichelmeyer (OOE)
- Updated 11/8/2012 w/Registrar Council feedback, ed. by Bichelmeyer (OOE)
- **Approved 11/8/12** by Registrar Council



- Revised 01/13/2013 w feedback from OOE
- Revised 7/11/2013 with coding changes by Wavle (OOE)
- Revised 9/4/2013 w/Registrar Council feedback
- Revised 12/10/2019 to update online/hybrid terminology by Wavle (OOE)
- Revised 5/27/20 to clarify synchronous delivery uses and align definitions with university-wide task force by Wavle (OOE)
- Revised 8/14/20 to rescind language allowing on-campus meetings for DO classes. COVID attributes will document this exception instead. (OOE)
- Revised 11/30/20 to correct table on page 9 (DO definition consistency) and update the flowchart on page 10 to reflect synchronous modalities. Updated many broken links to definitions websites (OOE)