

## 5. Policy on Course/Program Approval

As part of its accreditation procedures, the DETC Accrediting Commission conducts subject matter evaluations of distance study course/program materials in accordance with the following procedures. All course/program materials will be expended in the review and will not be returned to the institution. Courses must be approved before they can be offered for sale.

Accrediting Commission fees will be assessed per subject specialist for course/program reviews (see E.1. Fees). All fees must be paid prior to Accrediting Commission consideration.

All staff decisions to extend interim approvals to any course/program submitted for review are subject to review and confirmation by the DETC Accrediting Commission. The Commission reserves the right to withdraw or suspend interim approvals, add new conditions for permanent approval, or confirm staff approvals.

For a quick reference, please see table on page 14 of this Policy. Also, there are Templates for the Course/Program Report on DETC's web site ([www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org)). Select the "Member Services" tab and "Templates" (sign in using the word "guest" for both your user name and password), and select "Course Reviews."

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## • Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation

**For non-degree awarding and high school diploma-awarding** institutions undergoing initial accreditation, **one** complete copy of each **non-degree** distance education course/program offering must be submitted to the Accrediting Commission prior to the date of the on-site examination.

**For institutions offering degree programs**, the institution must submit at a minimum one-half (50%) of the curriculum for **each** degree program offered. In selecting the curriculum materials to be submitted to DETC, the institution must use the following criteria:

The courses should be:

1. broadly and fairly representative of the curriculum for the entire degree program;
2. selected from each level (i.e., 100, 200, 300, or 400) of the degree program; and
3. in different subject areas that fairly represent the complete program (i.e., general education, electives, core courses, etc.).

In addition, for each degree program offered, the institution must send a *Course/Program Report* (template on DETC's web site). The courses/programs must be submitted as described under "Submission Requirement" below.

The Commission will send the courses/programs to a subject specialist for review. If a course/program receives any "does not meet standard" ratings, the institution has several options as described in D.7. Responding to Not Met Ratings. Typically, an institution will respond to the ratings and the institution's comments will be returned to the subject specialist for his or her approval before the on-site visit. However, there may be occasions when the on-site subject specialist will review the institution's changes and determine whether the course meets the standards.

## • Institutions Seeking Re-accreditation

An institution undergoing a re-accreditation examination will submit the following number of courses/programs per division for review:

**For high school diploma-awarding institutions**, a minimum of **three** complete courses must be sent according to the instructions in "Submission Requirement" below.

**For non-degree awarding and/or military institutions**, if an institution offers 10 or fewer courses, it must submit five of its courses. If there are fewer than five courses, all must be submitted. If an institution offers more than 10 courses, it must submit a minimum of one-third of its total number of course offerings based upon the following selection criteria:

The courses should –

1. be broadly representative of all of the institution's offerings;
2. include at least one-fourth (25%) of the courses with highest enrollment; and
3. be in different fields of study.

Institutions must submit materials according to the instructions in "Submission Requirement" below.

**For degree-awarding institutions**, if an institution offers 15 or fewer degree programs, it must submit **five** of its

programs. If there are fewer than five degree programs, all must be submitted.

For institutions offering more than 15 degree programs, the institution must submit a minimum of one-third of its total number of degree programs offered based upon the following selection criteria:

The degree programs should –

1. be broadly representative of all of the institution’s offerings;
2. include at least one-fourth (25%) of the programs with highest enrollment; and
3. be in different fields of study.

**For each degree program to be submitted**, the institution must send a *Course/Program Report* (template on DETC’s web site). The institution must also send a **minimum** of **three** complete courses that specifically cover subject matter directly related to the degree programs’ primary objectives (including required textbooks, quizzes, examinations, assignments, projects, etc.). The courses selected for submission must be representative of the subject matter/discipline in the degree area, i.e., courses in the actual discipline rather than general education and/or orientation courses. The institution must submit the course materials according to the instructions in “Submission Requirement” below.

- **Requesting Approval of a New Course (non-degree or degree)**

Please note a “course” is defined as units of learning activities that result in the award of a diploma, certificate, or academic credit when completed. An example of a “course” would be English 101 in a degree program or a Medical Billing course where a student earns a certificate or diploma when completing the course.

Accredited institutions developing new courses must submit a complete set of each new course for review and approval in accordance with the following:

- **75 percent** of the course must be completed and submitted. The material submitted shall consist of the outline for the full course and the course objectives and individual lesson outcomes.
- The course must be submitted as described in “Submission Requirement” below and include the *Course/Program Report* (template on DETC’s web site).

- **Requesting Approval of a Revised Course (non-degree or degree)**

Previously approved courses undergoing **routine** revisions or updating *need not* be submitted for review. However, a detailed description of any **significant** change must be submitted to the Executive Director *prior* to implementation.

A substantial, major revision to a course would include the addition of substantial amounts of new material and kits, major changes in course objectives, substantial increases in either the requirements for successful completion of a course, or the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded.

**One** copy of a course undergoing substantial, major revisions must be submitted for evaluation. The course must be submitted as instructed in “Submission Requirement” below.

### • Requesting Approval of New Degree Program

Accredited institutions that already have degree-awarding approval at the same degree level may request an approval of a new degree program by submitting the following:

- A *Course/Program Report* (template on DETC’s web site) containing an outline of the entire proposed program, including overall program objectives of the degree program and learning objectives for each of the courses that will make up the program.
- A minimum of **three** complete courses that have been specifically developed for the proposed degree program (including required textbooks, quizzes, examinations, assignments, projects, et al.).

Institutions must also follow the instructions listed in “Submission Requirement” below. The courses selected for submission must be representative of the subject matter/discipline in the degree area, i.e., courses in the actual discipline rather than general education and/or orientation courses.

### • First Time Adding Degree Program(s) or Level Above Current Degree Offered

An institution proposing to offer degree program(s) for the first time or degree program(s) at a level above the program(s) presently being offered must submit at a minimum one-half (50%) of the curriculum for the new degree program(s) as described in “Submission Requirement” below. An institution may begin enrolling students; once it has been given tentative approval (see Approval Process below).

The institution must also undergo an on-site visit by an examining committee within one year of the first enrollment to verify that the institution meets the requirements stated in C.9. Policy on Degree Programs [added June 2008].

In preparation for the on-site review the institution must submit a streamlined and updated Self-Evaluation Report, which addresses the following areas as they specifically apply to the new degree program(s):

#### Institution’s Profile

- I. Institution Mission, Goals, and Objectives
- II. Educational Program Objectives, Curricula, and Materials
- III. Educational Services
- IV. Student Services
- VI. Qualifications of Administrators and Faculty
- VII. Admission Practices and Enrollment Agreements
- VIII. Advertising, Promotional Literature and Recruitment Personnel
- X. Tuition Policies and Refunds

Representatives of the appropriate state and federal agencies may be invited to observe the on-site visitation examination.

### • Requesting Approval of a Professional Doctoral Degree

The institution must submit with its application (E.5.) and its application fee of \$2,000, plus two sets of curricula materials (including all texts, study guides, and all virtual or printed instructional materials) for a **minimum of 30 semester hour credits or one-half of the total required semester credits for the degree program**. The course materials selected must be representative of the entire program and of the full range of delivery media used. The institution must also submit the full curriculum outline/program of instruction for the entire degree program(s),

including a scope description for each course and a list of the principal learning outcomes/educational objectives for each course in the program.

**- Minimum Staff and Faculty Requirements:** The institution must have on its full-time staff, prior to enrolling students (a) a qualified Academic Dean, Department Chair, or Chief Learning Officer specifically for the proposed degree program; and (b) qualified faculty members representing at least one-fourth of the total proposed degree program course offerings.

The instructional faculty must, at the time of application, possess an acceptable doctoral/terminal degree in the relevant field of study for the proposed doctoral degree program. The institution must have on staff a sufficient number of student services staff qualified to support doctoral level students.

**Self-Evaluation Report and On-Site Review:** See “First Time Adding a Degree Program” above.

### • Requesting Approval of a Revised Degree Program

Significant changes to a degree program must be reported. Significant changes would include such ongoing curricula actions like major revisions or updating courses/programs, adding, deleting, or changing courses within a degree program (e.g., changing the general education requirements for the degree program, etc.), changing the name of the degree program, eliminating a major thesis requirement, and similar **significant** revisions. The Executive Director will make a determination as to whether or not a full subject matter specialist evaluation of the proposed revisions may be required.

For an institution making substantial, major revisions to a degree program, the institution must submit the same information and material as outlined in “Accredited Institution Requesting Approval of New Degree Program” above.

### • Requesting Approval of a Certificate Program

Accredited institutions that already have degree-awarding approval may request approval of a “certificate program” as long as the courses comprising the certificate program are at the same degree level the institution is accredited to offer and the courses have already been reviewed as part of a degree program.

Although certificate programs can vary widely, they normally consist of a focused collection of credit-bearing courses that, when completed, affords the student a record of academic accomplishment in a given discipline or set of related disciplines.

Typically, certificate programs contain a collection of credit-bearing courses configured to equip students with specialized knowledge in a subject area with content that is less extensive than what is provided in an entire degree program. It is not an academic degree program, but the credits earned in the certificate program may be transferred to an appropriate degree program if they otherwise meet the academic requirements of the degree program, and have been approved by DETC. The courses requirements cannot be changed if credit is being offered.

When requesting approval of a “certificate program,” please provide the following for the program:

- Purpose, goals and objectives of the certificate
- Population the certificate will serve
- Expected career or learning outcomes

- Program admission requirements
- Courses in the program and from which degree program
- Total number of credits earned
- Faculty qualifications
- Marketing information
- Enrollment agreement

If the certificate program contains any courses that have not previously been approved by DETC, these courses will need to be submitted for evaluation and approval.

The certificate program must have a disclaimer to prospective students that it is not a “degree” program, but a “certificate” program. The program should be restricted to the appropriate degree level, e.g., baccalaureate, master’s, etc. depending on which courses make up the certificate program.

As stated in DETC Business Standards I.B.2, the word “accredited” may not be used in conjunction with **certification** programs, which are different from “certificate” programs described above.

### ● **Acquiring Other Accredited Courses/Programs**

When a DETC-accredited institution decides to acquire already approved courses/programs from another DETC-accredited institution, the acquiring institution must submit one copy of a “Special Report” on the acquired courses/programs. The report must address the following items:

1. The institution must stipulate that there will be no significant changes in the curricula content, learning objectives, texts, or evaluation assignments beyond what has previously been approved by DETC Commission. If there are significant changes, a new subject specialist review will be required for the courses/programs;
2. Names and resumes for the entire teaching faculty that document that the Commission’s standards are being met;
3. Draft of the promotional literature, web site copy, and enrollment agreements that will be used to promote the acquired courses/programs;
4. The pricing of the courses/programs;
5. A brief analysis of how the courses/programs support the mission of the acquiring institution and how that institution has the resources to offer the programs; and
6. Any contemplated changes to the courses/programs that may be under consideration.

After receipt of the Special Report, interim staff approval subject to the confirmation of the Accrediting Commission may be extended.

## Approval Process

Once the Commission staff receives all of the subject specialist reports, the staff may give the institution **tentative** approval of any new or revised course/program receiving all “Meets Standard” ratings. Final approval must be confirmed by action of the Accrediting Commission at its next meeting.

If a course/program receives any “Partially Meets Standard” means that although the course/program meets the standard, the institution should seriously consider the suggestion(s) and/or concerns of the subject specialists. The institution must reply in writing to the comments of the subject specialist for any “partially meets” or “does not meet” ratings. (See D.7. Responding to Course Ratings.)

If a course/program receives any “Course/Program Does Not Meet the Standard,” the course/program cannot be approved at this time. The institution may exercise one of the following three options:

- A. Make changes and re-submit
- B. Request new reviewer
- C. Withdraw course/program

If an institution satisfactorily responds and corrects areas in a new or revised course/program that received “partially meets” or “does not meet” ratings from a subject specialist (in accordance with D.7.), the Commission staff, at its discretion, may give the institution tentative approval. The Accrediting Commission at its next meeting must confirm final approval of the action. The Commission reserves the right to withdraw or suspend interim approvals, add new conditions for permanent approval, or confirm staff approvals.

Subject specialists normally perform their evaluation of course/program materials prior to the on-site visit. As a general rule, they may accompany visiting teams if the course/program includes mandatory resident training for students, optional resident training, a degree program, or if the institution offers extensive or highly technical programs.

The approval by the staff and the Commission for an institution to offer new courses/programs as “accredited” is contingent upon the institution receiving any required authorizations from the applicable state authorities (or its equivalent for non-U.S. institutions).

## Submission Requirement

All courses/program materials must be submitted in accordance with the following procedures:

- A “Course/Program Report” (see Templates on DETC’s web site), including textbooks and study guides;
- Each set of a course/program that is submitted must be accompanied by a complete set of tools, kits, equipment, and aids that are provided to students as a part of the course/program.
- Courses must be packaged separately with the outside of the shipping carton clearly labeled with the name of the institution and title of the course. For degree programs, two or more courses that are representative of the degree program may be shipped in one box. Also, other groupings that may go to the same Subject Specialist in a particular area, i.e., general education, core courses, etc., may be shipped in the same box. In all cases, each box should not weigh more than 30 pounds.

If you have any questions, please contact Nan Bayster Ridgeway, Director of Accreditation, at 202-234-5100 ext. 103 or nan@detc.org.

Select the “Member Services” tab and “Templates” (sign in using the word “guest” for both your user name and password), and select “Course /Program Report for Degree Program” or “Course/Program Report for Vocational Program.” There are also samples of these reports under “Evaluator’s Documents” section.

**Summary of Course/Program Approvals:**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Type of Course/Programs Offered</b>	<b>For review</b>
<b>Initial Applicant</b>	High School	One copy of each course
	Non-Degree/Military	One copy of each course
	Degree	50% of the courses in each degree program
<b>Re-accreditation</b>	High School	3 courses
	Non-Degree/Military	(detailed <i>Course/Program Report for Vocational Courses/Programs</i> and courses as determined below)
	5 or fewer	all courses
	6 to 10	5 courses
	More than 10	One-third of all courses
	Degree	(detailed <i>Course/Program Report for Degree Programs</i> and 3 complete courses per degree program as determined below)
	5 or fewer	all degree programs
	6 to 15	5 degree programs
	More than 15	One-third of total number of degree programs
<b>Accredited Institutions</b>	New Course (non-degree or degree)	75% of course and detailed Course/Program Report
	Significant Revised Course (non-degree or degree)	75% of course and detailed Course/Program Report
	New degree program	detailed Course/Program Report and 3 complete courses
	Revised degree program	detailed Course/Program Report and 3 complete courses
	First Time Adding Degree Program	50% of curriculum of new degree program and updated SER and on-site visit. Site visit will take place within one year of first enrollment
	First Time Adding Doctoral Degree	2 sets of curricula materials = minimum of 30 credit hours or one-half of total required credits for degree and on-site visit. Site visit will take place within one year of first enrollment
	Adding a New Degree a Level Above Current Degree offered	50% of curriculum of new degree program and updated SER and on-site visit. Site visit will take place within one year of first enrollment
	Acquiring Other Accredited Courses/Programs	Special Report

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