Thank you for your service

Chosen for your expertise and experience

But even our best efforts need some guidance
We have omitted a video here. It was a 30 second clip entitled “De-Ice My Car.” (Spoiler: a person spends a long time clearing all the snow and ice off of his car, only to discover that it was the wrong car)

If you would like to view it, it can be found at the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBQxkFRz-YQ
Evaluating Distance Education: An Introduction

Point of this session is to point you to “the right car”

Your role is to evaluate a school’s distance education

• Not in light of your own school
• But in light of ATS Commission Standards
Evaluating Distance Education: A Context

As we begin this training session, consider larger context of higher education:

- Most common type of distance education is online learning
- Increased 3-fold in last decade: > 2.5 million to 6.7 million
- One in three postsecondary students now an online learner

Unfortunately, we’re not aware of any national numbers for Canada, but online learning appears also to be growing rapidly in that country.
Evaluating Distance Education: A Context

ATS numbers not as large, but still striking

- In last decade: 12 to 132 schools with “comprehensive” D.E.
- ATS member schools have 23,000 online students (1 in 3)
- Average ATS school has 175 online students (median is 60)
Evaluating Distance Education: A Context

ATS online students mostly at Protestant schools

- Only 9 of the 132 approved schools are Roman Catholic (9 of 54 = 17%)
- But 123 of those 132 schools are Protestant (123 of 191 = 64%)
- In last decade, online learning grown from 5% to over 50% in ATS

NOTE: 245 accredited member schools
271 total ATS member schools
Evaluating Distance Education: An Overview

Brief Note before Overview

Highly effective habit for evaluators
Your “end” product is “brief” report
Part of a larger committee report

Part of broader committee responsibilities

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Plan
Evaluating Distance Education: An Overview

Broader committee responsibilities in 3 areas:

1) **Before the visit:**
   - **Become familiar with Standards**
     (found at [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu) under “Accrediting”)
   - Review school’s self-study report
     (sent by school 45 days prior to visit)
   - **Participate in committee conf. call**
     (led by chair/ATS staff 1-2 weeks before visit)
Broader committee responsibilities in 3 areas:

2) During the visit: Interview appropriate personnel
   (may need to interview online students)
   Review relevant materials onsite
   (ask permission to access online courses)
   Reach consensus on recommendations
   (typically by end of last full day*)

*Most visits are Monday evening through Thursday morning.*
Broader committee responsibilities in 3 areas:

3) **After** the visit:  **Write a brief report on distance ed**
   (and any other assigned sections)
   *(typically 1-2 pages under ES.4 section)*
   **Send your section(s) of report to chair**
   *(usually done within one week of visit end)*
   **Review “final” report with all sections**
   *(follow directions by chair on this)*

3

Board of Commissioners makes final decision 2-6 months later
*(Group of 18 elected by membership from members and public)*
A reminder about conflicts of interest:

- Each committee member will receive a Conflict of Interest Form from the ATS office. This form must be filled out and submitted prior to participation on an evaluation visit.

- “A potential conflict of interest includes the following relationships with a school undergoing evaluation, whether the relationship involves that person or an immediate family member: employment (including past employment or prior/current application for employment); current employment at a school in a consortial relationship; enrollment as a student (past or present, including denial of admission); recipient of an award or honor; provision of goods or services; service as a trustee (past or present); regular recruitment of prospective students or staff; or any other relationship that could threaten a fair and objective evaluation.” (Board of Commissioners Policy Manual, I.C.2.d)

- No evaluation committee member who has a potential conflict of interest shall be involved in an evaluation or accrediting decision.

- If you suspect a potential conflict of interest, or have questions about the policy, please contact your Commission staff liaison immediately.
Evaluating Distance Education: An Overview

Five Sections for This Training Session

1) Definition of Distance Education
2) Review of Commission Procedures on Distance Education
3) Discussion of Commission Standards as a Whole
4) Discussion of Educational Standard (ES.4 on Distance Ed.)
5) Key Issues in Evaluating Distance Education: Five Factors

Concluding Comments
1) Definition of Distance Education...but first

Four types of ATS Commission-approved education:

1) **Campus-based education** (ES.2)—value of face to face learning
2) **Extension education** (ES.3)—value of multiple places to learn
3) **Distance education** (ES.4)—value of anywhere/anytime learning
4) **Individual instruction** (ES.5)—valued, but not DE

Reminded of President Garfield’s aphorism:

“The best education is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.”
1) Definition of Distance Education—Long quote!!

“Distance education is a mode of education in which a course is offered without students and instructors being in the same location. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous and employs the use of technology. Distance education courses may consist of exclusively online or other technologically assisted instruction or a blend of intensive classroom and online instruction. In all cases, distance education courses shall ensure regular and substantive interaction of faculty with students.” (ES.4.1)
Evaluating Distance Education: 1) Definition

1) Break Definition into 4 parts—1st Part

“Distance education is a mode of education in which a course is offered **without students and instructors being in the same location.**”

NOTE: Even if courses are live, interactive video between main campus and extension site, still “distance education.” In such cases the line between “extension education” and “distance education” can be blurry, but still two different modalities.
1) Break Definition into 4 parts—2nd Part

“Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous and employs the use of technology.”

NOTE: Most distance education is asynchronous online education, but cannot be “correspondence courses.” Not all logged on at the same time, but all must be logged on within a reasonable time frame, typically several times per week.
1) Break Definition into 4 parts—3rd Part

“Distance education courses may consist of exclusively online or other technologically assisted instruction or a blend [hybrid] of intensive classroom and online instruction.”

NOTE: Hybrid courses can produce best learning outcomes, but they meet residency requirements only if at least half of the “instruction” is face to face (see ES.4.2.19)—will cover later.
Evaluating Distance Education: 1) Definition

1) Break Definition into 4 parts—4th Part

“In all cases, distance education courses shall ensure regular and substantive interaction of faculty with students.”

NOTE: Critical component to evaluate during visit; cannot, e.g., be faculty-recorded lectures delegated to a student grader. This kind of interaction is a core value for ATS Commission members, which is why correspondence courses are not permitted.
Evaluating Distance Education: Brief Recap

Five Sections for This Training Session

1) Definition of Distance Education
2) Review of Commission Procedures on Distance Education
3) Discussion of Commission Standards: Standards as a Whole
4) Discussion of Educational Standard (ES.4) on Distance Ed.
5) Key Issues in Evaluating Distance Education: Five Factors
Evaluating Distance Education: 2) Procedures

Commission Procedures are grounded in the Standards (www.ats.edu/accrediting/procedures-policies-and-bylaws)

Procedures (section VI.D) describe approval process for distance education—at two levels:

1) Five or fewer courses require no approval, just reporting on “ARF”
2) Six or more courses requires approval by Board of Commissioners called “comprehensive distance education” approval
Clarification on “comprehensive distance education” approval

“The Board [of Commissioners] interprets the phrase “when as many as six of the courses offered in any degree program” to mean that a petition is required whenever a school wants to offer more than five different courses (not different sections of the same course) through distance education, regardless of when those courses are offered (in the same semester or over different semesters) and regardless of whether those courses apply to one degree program or multiple degree programs.”

[from Petition for Comprehensive Distance Education]
Approval of “comprehensive distance education” means approval of a *delivery system, not a program*

So, once approved a school can deliver any of its programs that way, provided it continues to meet all applicable Degree Program Standards.

NOTE: The online template “Petition for Comprehensive Distance Education” is also a useful guide for evaluating distance education. It can be found on the ATS website (www.ats.edu) under: Accrediting → Petitions
Three special requirements for approval (Procedures VI.G.5):

– Must verify student identity (check if secure login/password)
– Must protect student privacy (see how school secures data)
– Must publish any added student costs (see how/when done)

NOTE: At present, courts have vacated federal (USDE) regulation on “state authorization,” but not state regulations. Standard 2.2 requires schools to comply with all applicable laws, including state. So, committee must verify that school has policy to determine if it triggers any state regulations and, if so, how it meets those.

See “Targeted Issues Checklist” sent to committees (1st item) and “Guidelines Regarding State Authorization for Distance Education”
Evaluating Distance Education: Brief Recap

Five Sections for This Training Session

1) Definition of Distance Education
2) Review of Commission Procedures on Distance Education
3) Discussion of Commission Standards as a Whole *
4) Discussion of Educational Standard (ES.4) on Distance Ed.
5) Key Issues in Evaluating Distance Education: Five Factors

* The Commission Standards are approved by the entire membership of some 245 accredited schools, not by the 18-member Board of Commissioners or by the Commission staff. The most recent revision was approved in June 2012.
Evaluating Distance Ed: 3) Standards as a Whole

ATS Commission

• Accredits institutions
• Approves programs
A. General Institutional Standards

1. Purpose, Planning, Evaluation
2. Institutional Integrity
3. Theological Curriculum
4. Library and Information Resources
5. Faculty
6. Student Recruitment, Admissions, Services, and Placement
7. Authority and Governance
8. Institutional Resources
Evaluating Distance Ed: 3) Standards as a Whole

B. Educational Standard (ES)

ES.1 Degree Programs and Nomenclature
ES.2 Campus-Based Education
ES.3 Extension Education
**ES.4 Distance Education**
ES.5 Faculty-Directed Individual Instruction
ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
ES.7 Academic Guidelines (Admissions, Transfer, etc.)
ES.8 Non-Degree Instructional Programs
Evaluating Distance Ed: 3) Standards as a Whole

C. Degree Program Standards

A. Master of Divinity
B. Master of Arts in ___ [professional MAs]
C. Master of Church Music
D. Master of Arts (academic MAs)
E. Doctor of Ministry
F. Doctor of Education
G. Doctor of _____ (e.g. DMiss)
H. Doctor of Musical Arts
I. Master of Theology
J. Doctor of Philosophy/Theology
Evaluating Distance Education: Brief Recap

Five Sections for This Training Session

1) Definition of Distance Education
2) Review of Commission Procedures on Distance Education
3) Discussion of Commission Standards as a Whole
4) Discussion of Educational Standard (ES.4) on Distance Ed.
5) Key Issues in Evaluating Distance Education: Five Factors
A. Evaluating educational design and development

- “Schools shall demonstrate how programs offered through distance education implement both the institutional and the relevant degree program goals” (ES.4.2.1)—Demonstrated? Key question: Why offer distance ed? (mission or money)

- “Guard against... courses that lack coherence and curricular design” (ES.4.2.2)—Do they?
A. Evaluating educational design and development

- “Shall seek to enhance personal and spiritual formation... and shall require regular and substantive interaction between teachers and learners and among learners to ensure a community of learning” (ES.4.2.3)

Is “formation” happening?

Is there “regular and substantive interaction”?

Is there a “community of learning”? 
A. Evaluating educational design and development

“Development and review of courses shall be a collaborative effort among faculty, librarians, technical support staff, and students....” (ES.4.2.4)

What evidence of collaboration? Check minutes
B. Evaluating the assessment of distance education

• “Shall be established, approved, and reviewed by the regular institutional policies and procedures...” (ES.4.2.5)

Is distance education interwoven or an “add on”? 
B. Evaluating the assessment of distance education

• “...and assessment of student learning” (ES.4.2.5)

Are four items in ES.6.1 present?

1) Process for ongoing evaluation of goals/outcomes
2) Identification of direct and indirect measures
3) Routine involvement of faculty in assessment
4) Linking results to improvement, planning, resources

Assessment is art, not paint-by-numbers.
C. Evaluating relationship to residency requirement

- “...shall conform to the residency requirements required by the relevant degree program standard...” (ES.4.2.6)

Are the following residency requirements met?

- **Full residency** for EdD, ThM, PhD/ThD (Standards F, I, J)
- **No residency** for Academic MAs (Standard D)
- **1/3 residency** for all others (Standards A, B, C, E, G, H)
- **Exceptions to any residency requirement may be granted, but must petition separately. See the list of “Approved Exceptions and Experiments” on the Commission website.**
Evaluating Distance Ed: 4) ES.4 on Distance Ed

C. Evaluating relationship to residency requirement

- Hybrid courses meet residency requirement “only if the majority of instructor-directed learning occurs in situations where both faculty and students are in person on the school’s main campus or at an extension site approved for the school to offer the full degree” (ES.4.2.19)

Does your sampling of hybrid course syllabi verify this?

NOTE: A 3-semester-credit course typically requires at least 37 hours of classroom instruction. So, only hybrids offering at least 19 hours face-to-face (f2f) meet residency requirement.
Evaluating Distance Ed: 4) ES.4 on Distance Ed

D. Evaluating educational resources

• If contracted out, school is still responsible “for academic integrity and quality” and must document that (ES.4.2.7)

  Does this school inappropriately “outsource” distance education?
  [For example, cannot outsource over 50% to non-accredited entity]

• “Shall demonstrate that students are required to make appropriate use of [library] resources” (ES.4.2.8)

  Do syllabi/interviews verify that online students use library resources?

• If use other libraries, “school shall have written agreements” (ES.4.2.9)—Are there?
Evaluating Distance Ed: 4) ES.4 on Distance Ed

E. Evaluating technological resources

• Sufficient technological support for faculty/students, including training (ES.4.2.10)—Is there?

• Systemic evaluation/upgrading of technology (ES.4.2.11)
  Ask faculty/tech staff? Budgeted?

• “Ensure that educational objectives are not hindered by time delays…” (ES.4.2.11)—Ask faculty and students about their experiences? May need to do some interviews “online”? 
F. Evaluating faculty resources and involvement

• Faculty policies (hiring, development, etc.)
  (ES.4.2.13)—Same online as onsite?

• Full-time faculty responsible for DE
  (ES.4.2.14)—What is their involvement?

• Part-time faculty have support
  (ES.4.2.15)—Ask adjuncts if they do?

[Can you really earn six figures?]
Evaluating Distance Ed: 4) ES.4 on Distance Ed

G. Evaluating student services and resources

- Published technology expectations for prospective distance students (ES.4.2.16-17)—Reviewed?
  
  *School should publish these on website where prospective students can easily access. Some even provide “test.”*

- Institutional provision of adequate student support services, e.g. advising (ES.4.2.18)—Ask online students?
Evaluating Distance Education: Brief Recap

Five Sections for This Training Session

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Evaluating Distance Ed: 5) Key Issues

1st of Five Factors: Purpose of Distance Education

WHY? is school involved in distance education? (economic or educational)

Explore financial implications of DE (helping/hindering bottom line)
Evaluating Distance Ed: 5) Key Issues

2nd of Five Factors: Delivery of Distance Education

If delivered *online*, review school’s LMS

Is their Learning Management System adequate?
(user friendly, faculty friendly, cost effective, flexible)

If delivered *otherwise*, review adequacy of system
(e.g. does interactive video work well, consistently?)
Evaluating Distance Ed: 5) Key Issues

3rd of Five Factors: Support of Distance Education

Do distant students feel distant?

Do online faculty feel supported?
Evaluating Distance Ed: 5) Key Issues

4th of Five Factors: Involvement in Distance Education

Faculty as a whole?
Individual instructors?
Dead faculty????

Teaching
But
Not
Present?

In 1832, British philosopher Jeremy Bentham asked that his body be preserved and allowed to meet with his colleagues at all College Board meetings. Bentham’s last wish was granted, and his clothed skeleton and mummified head are displayed at the end of the South Cloisters of the Main Building of the University College of London. Official meeting minutes reflect his presence as "Jeremy Bentham - present but not voting."
5th of Five Factors: Assessment of Distance Education

> In 1990s “no significant difference”

> 2009 Evaluation of ...Online Learning reviewed 1,000 studies:

“The meta-analysis found that, on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction.”
[after accounting for 51 different variables]

Key question: Can school document that its distant students are achieving the program’s student learning outcomes?
Evaluating Distance Education: Brief Recap

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Concluding Comments
Caution
Evaluate school’s distance education based on ATS Commission Standards, not your own school
Evaluating Distance Ed: Concluding Comments

Commission staff liaisons:

Lester Ruiz  
Tom Tanner  
Barbara Mutch  
Debbie Creamer

In-house staff:

Lori Neff LaRue  
Joshua Reinders
Commission’s Purpose

to enhance and improve theological education through accreditation

Value of Accreditation is in assuring and advancing quality theological education by and among peers
Thank you!