

Appendix 17 - 2014 Education Committee Charge 17 PA Charge 4 – Standard 9-10

Evaluation of Best Practices for Assessment and Distance Learning

A search of existing research in the field of online education and distance learning shows that the boating safety online courses do not fit into a particular category for distance learning, online courses or internet education. Boating safety online courses are not conducted over a long period of time, an instructor is not part of the course, there is no interaction among students and the courses are taken asynchronously. A comparison of the existing research to the boating safety online courses can be found in Appendix A. Therefore, this makes it difficult to find available research that is relevant and applicable to the type of online courses set forth in the boating safety courses approved by NASBLA.

The work involved in the charge to review and apply the best practices for distance learning to NASBLA Education Standard 10 requires the work of professional researchers in the field of online education. Although the committee members are well-versed in the field of boating safety education, none of them are qualified professionals in the field of online education.

An instructional designer is someone who studies how information is delivered and helps content experts and educators determine how to help people learn in better ways. Often, this involves adapting one format of learning (i.e. classroom) for another style (i.e. online). An instructional designer will determine the best methods for presenting content to learners in a way that makes the learning as close to real life and includes engaging activities.

The committee members believe that hiring two instructional designers who specialize in the field of online learning is necessary to determine whether the current NASBLA standards for delivery, presentation, and assessments of online courses (Standards 9 and 10) are in accord with best practices for distance learning. Since the field of instructional design is broad, it would be beneficial to work with at least two different instructional designers from two separate institutions/companies in order to get adequate feedback to assist in evaluating NASBLA Standards 9 and 10.

To aid in the discussion with the instructional designers who are contracted to perform this work, the committee members have developed a list of questions that the Instructional designers should answer after looking only at the NASBLA Standards, not at the existing courses. This list of questions can be found in Appendix B.

In terms of costs, the committee members estimate that a session with each instructional designer could range in cost from \$2,000-\$3,500. This price would include the work in evaluating NASBLA Standards 9 and 10 as written, suggesting changes to Standards 9 and 10 in any areas where they were found to not be in accord with best practices, and would also include a presentation and document on his/her findings.

It is recommended that NASBLA pursue a fast-track grant or other outside funding to support this project.

Following these evaluations and assessments of NASBLA Standards 9 and 10, the committee members could revise the wording of NASBLA Standards 9 and 10 to be more in line with the best practices for online education.

Appendix A: Comparison of the existing research for distance learning and online courses compared to the boating safety online courses

Available Research for Distance Learning or Online Courses	Current Boating Safety Online Courses as dictated by the NASBLA Standards
Course takes place over a long period of time (weeks or months)	Course takes place over a short period of time (hours)
Instructor-led courses	No instructor
Interaction between students and instructor	No interaction
Multiple assessment opportunities over length of the course	Chapter/unit quizzes and final exam are only modes of assessment
Blend of synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (at own pace) learning	Only asynchronous (at own pace) learning
No time requirements for reading or studying materials	Reading and studying materials requires specific amounts of time be spent on each page/section

Appendix B: Questions for the Instructional Designer(s)

1. Does the amount of time required for an internet delivered course required in Standard 10 reflect actual time required to cover course material? (That is, do the content requirements outlined in Standards 1-8 dictate a course that is longer than the current time requirement? (classroom delivery is a minimum of 6 hours, without assessment)
2. Given that the goal is to ensure that the online student is exposed to all of the course content, is the requirement to spend an allocated time on each page appropriate? Would an alternative be a required time limit for specific standard (or chapter) to be divided as the student needs? Which is the best practice? Are there other approaches, rather than a specified time per page, that ensures that the student is exposed to all of the content in a course?
3. Current standards require that if a student does not pass a chapter, they are required to review the failed chapter under the same timing mechanism. Is this the best practice for handling students who need additional study when the assessments test only a small percentage of the course content in a chapter?

4. NASBLA Standard 10 requires that course content be presented in narrative fashion. Is this the most appropriate way to deliver subject information?
 5. What is the best way to provide a “site map” of the course content for students so that they understand what material they have already covered and what material is still to come?
 6. Is there a better way to ensure that students are actively participating in the course other than the advancement using a “next button”?
 7. If you were to design an online course based on standards, what would you INCLUDE that isn't a part of the current standards and what would your EXCLUDE that is a part of the current standards?
 8. What are delivery standards for other compliance-type online courses where the student must satisfy a minimum course time requirement?
 9. Are there any other online assessment methods that can evaluate whether a student meets a minimum mastery of the knowledge requirements for a compliance certification?
 10. Is a 50 question assessment the appropriate number of exam questions to test learners knowledge given the volume of content required in Standards 1-8? (I'm wondering if they have a suggestion for QUANTITY vs QUALITY of exam questions...)
 11. What would be the best practice for % of assessment as “practical application” questions VS “knowledge base” questions? Is there a best practice for style of questions? (By “practical application” I mean a real scenario based question instead of asking directly about a knowledge point. I would assume that “practical application” questions would make the learner think more about their answer based on what they've learned)
 12. Is there anything you would add or remove from “Assessment Standard 1” on how to create final assessment answers?
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