Please read the coronavirus related information below provided by CHEA (with references and link to USDE).

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) released a letter on March 5, 2020 “providing broad approval to institutions to use online technologies to accommodate students on a temporary basis, without going through the regular approval process of the Department.” In addition, USDE is “permitting accreditors to waive their distance education review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of COVID-19.”

CHEA also shared some FSA guidance on accreditation related to use of distance education:

- USDE is providing broad approval to institutions to use online technologies to accommodate students on a temporary basis, without the need to obtain ED approval where such approval would otherwise be required. This flexibility applies only to a program during a payment period that overlaps with 5 March, the date of the electronic announcement, or the following payment period.

- UDSE is permitting accreditors to waive their distance education approval requirements for institutions that seek to use online courses as a temporary way to serve students for whom COVID-19 interrupts their enrollment. This flexibility applies only with respect to students who were in attendance when the interruption occurred, and the flexibility is not available for clock-hour courses that lead to licensure if the relevant body will not accept distance education for purposes of licensure requirements.

- Institutions are not required to use “sophisticated learning management systems or online platforms” for Title IV purposes. Nevertheless, to meet UDSE’s distance-education definition, the institution must communicate with students through certain technologies and instructors must initiate substantive communications with students, either individually or collectively, on a regular basis. USDE acknowledges that accreditors may have standards related to distance education, but it is permitting accreditors to waive those standards to address COVID-19.”

Watch for an ABFSE status update next week.