

Quality Standards CERTIFICATION

The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) offers the only distance learning certification program in the United States.

The goal of USDLA/Quality Standards is three-fold. First, the program **informs and protects** the growing number of educational consumers who are considering distance learning. Second, USDLA/QS provides to schools both the tools and a framework for **continuous improvement**. Third, effective self-regulation fosters a climate more conducive to **public support and continued growth**.

USDLA/QS certification is based on a melding of USDLA's best practices for distance learning with proven techniques of the quality movement. The program's structure serves to hold schools accountable while promoting improvement.

Although the U.S. accreditors, and especially the regional accrediting associations, have in recent

years included guidance for distance learning, there is a perception that their "common" approach is unevenly applied both within and between accrediting bodies.

Inherent in accreditation is peer review. Regularly fielding a team of peers that is both academically and technologically competent can be difficult.

QS delivers greater consistency because of two factors. First, e-learning programs are more thoroughly reviewed. Second, the reviews are conducted by a small cadre of specialists who are familiar with best practices across the entire spectrum of distance learning and who regularly review other such programs.

The USDLA/QS symbol certifies that a school adheres to a recognized standard of performance and is committed to offering a first-quality distance learning program.

Structure

USDLA/QS certification is a standards-based program that recognizes excellence across a range of distance learning settings.

USDLA/QS derives its power both from its breadth and from its flexibility. A modular approach facilitates custom solutions. The 124 standards are functionally organized in these areas:

- Administration, leadership, and management
- Student affairs
- Teaching and learning
- Learning infrastructure

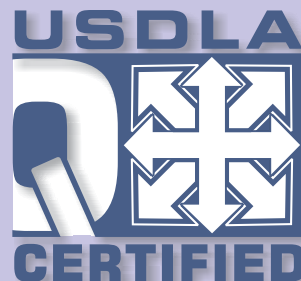
Format: Certification is based on Standards of Practice, a Code of Conduct, and evidence of a well-implemented continuous improvement process. [see below]

Term: Certification is awarded for a five year period, subject to performance and annual renewal.

Estimated completion: 60 to 120 days

Cost: Initial review begins at \$4,750, depending on breadth and scope of Quality Standards review process. Modest annual service fee.

The USDLA/QS symbol certifies that an institution adheres to recognized standards of quality and performance, is responsive to its constituencies, and is committed to excellence in all aspects of its distance learning program.



USDLA/Quality Standards

Summative Overview

Area	Standard of practice		#
1	Institutional prerequisites		
2	Administration, leadership, and management		
	2.1	Integrity	12
	2.2	Structure and organization	7
	2.3	Academic development	4
	2.4	Quality management	4
	2.5	Financial management	2
3	Student affairs		
	3.1	Recruitment and admissions	11
	3.2	Guidance and counseling	5
	3.3	Orientation	2
	3.4	Fees and refunds	4
	3.5	Records and transcripts	9
	3.6	Grievances	4
	3.7	Progression and intervention	4
4	Teaching and learning		
	4.1	Curriculum	5
	4.2	Course structure and instruction	13
	4.3	Student evaluation	5
	4.4	Program assessment	5
5	Infrastructure		
	5.1	Distance learning advocacy and support	2
	5.2	Distance learning technology	5
	5.3	Faculty/staff support	5
	5.4	Student support	5
	5.5	Contractor relations	6

United States Distance Learning Association

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Process

Three elements make up the USDLA/QS program.

1. The school does a self-inspection based on the **Standards of Practice** for distance learning. The school attests to its compliance and that is then independently verified.
2. The school agrees to abide by the Quality Standards **Code of Conduct**.
3. The school is accountable to a **continuous improvement** process. Certification can be withdrawn if there is a pattern of failure.

Standards of practice

The USDLA/QS program incorporates 124 standards. Rarely would all of the standards be applicable to an institution. Exemptions are granted by the review team without penalty.

Sixty of these standards are in the form of rubrics. The rubrics have three tiers of response: *Target*, *Satisfactory*, and *Unsatisfactory*. There are sixty-four standards in a *Yes/No* format.

Each standard includes an evidence block. The school should respond to each standard with at least one artifact that demonstrates compliance. This requirement is not intended to be burdensome or exhaustive. Rather, the process anticipates a concrete, specific reference that will be understandable to the review team.

Code of conduct

The school agrees to operate consistently with the principles summarized below.

- Practice high ethical principles.
- Comply with legal and regulatory requirements of its jurisdiction.
- Conform to generally accepted norms for its academic programs.
- Communicate openly and honestly.
- Honor its promises and commitments.