



COMMISSION ON OSTEOPATHIC COLLEGE ACCREDITATION

March 11, 2020

Subject: Guidance for Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (COM) related to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA) held a special meeting by telephone conference on March 9, 2020 to discuss concerns related the coronavirus outbreak. The topics included distance learning, clinical rotations, and alternative ways to satisfy OMM and other lab requirements schools may have, if in-person instruction is not available, and how to handle students that may be in jeopardy of graduating in more than 6 years due to interruptions in study caused by the Coronavirus (COCA Standards: element 6.3). The Department of Education released a [letter](#) on March 5, 2020 giving institutions the approval to use distance education temporarily to respond to the coronavirus without going through the regular accreditation approval process. The letter also addressed how institutions can comply with Title IV, HEA requirements if the coronavirus impacts a student or campus.

Following the Department of Education's letter, the COCA at its March 9, 2020 meeting voted to approve distance learning until the end of the semester or quarter (current Title IV funding period). The COCA recognizes that individual COM leadership is in the best position to make accommodations for their student body and leaves the important decisions to individual COMs, while COMs continue to maintain their learning objectives as reasonably as can be achieved.

COMs that opt to offer distance learning as a contingency plan in response to the coronavirus outbreak, need to document the steps taken by the COM, and the reasons for the decisions, and steps taken to ensure students satisfy educational requirements. The COCA recognizes the need for flexibility in evaluating the steps taken by the COM. The COCA encourages COMs to seek consultation from COCA staff if the COM has questions about whether the steps taken are consistent with COCA requirements and standards. Additionally, COMs need to communicate their contingency plans to the COCA staff with a report to the COCA at the end of the quarter/semester.

The COCA is providing the following suggestions to COMs seeking guidance for their students who may be in hospitals that are closed to students as non-essential personnel:

Amongst other methods of instruction, COMs can:

- Find alternate sites for their students to complete their rotations
- Offer online learning to their students
- Re-schedule student vacation time to accommodate switching rotation schedules
- Re-schedule some classes to the summer or fall so students can finish on time
- Offer teleconference options with clinical scenarios

COMs with students facing the limits of Standard 6.3 that are affected by interruptions to their education due to COVID-19 should extend those students time commensurate with the time missed due to the disruption. Documentation of the same may be required by the COCA in a future update.

If you have specific questions related to your COM, please contact the COCA staff directly at predoc@osteopathic.org or by calling (312) 202-8124.