



Kristen F. Soares, President

May 1, 2020

Ms. Diane Auer Jones
Principal Deputy Undersecretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Subject: Request to Extend the Distance Education Waiver to the End of the 2020-21 Academic Year

Dear Principal Deputy Undersecretary Jones:

First, on behalf of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU), I would like to thank you and Secretary DeVos for the quick work of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) on the disbursement of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. Students and institutions need this support, now more than ever. We look forward to working further with you on future federal aid for students and institutions during this unprecedented crisis.

AICCU is the organizational voice for 85 independent, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. Together, our colleges and universities serve over 180,000 graduate students and nearly 200,000 undergraduate students, including over 57,000 Pell Grant recipients. About a quarter of our students are from out of state, making unencumbered access to online distance education vital to them and their campuses. Most of our students were sent home due to the COVID-19 crisis, including out-of-state students. Our institutions converted quickly to teaching in an online format to ensure their students continued with their high-quality education, despite the challenges around them.

There are many unknowns that higher education is facing¹. We simply do not know the state of higher education as we enter the new academic year; we do not know if in-state and out-of-state students will return to campus; we do not know if campuses will have to continue to rely on online education.

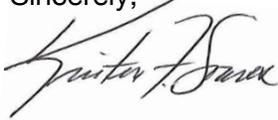
The existing waiver allows “accreditors [to] waive those standards for schools implementing distance learning programs solely for the purpose of allowing currently enrolled students to complete a term interrupted by COVID-19 closures.” However, the waiver is only in effect through June 30, 2020². Given the ongoing uncertainty for students and our institutions, ***AICCU asks that the department extends the waiver timeframe until the end of the 2020-21 academic year.***

Our colleges and universities face the additional obstacle of California not being part of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements. California institutions—public

and nonprofit—currently have to go state-by-state to negotiate and sign individual reciprocity agreements. Without the waiver, our institutions face the financial burden of entering into agreements with states they currently are not authorized in; alternatively, they may not extend educational services for the out-of-state student to continue. An extension of the temporary waiver would help California institutions and our students and ensure we can continue to serve them. Additionally, an extension of the waiver will give California colleges and universities the opportunity to develop a long-term solution that addresses the needs of higher education and the concerns of opponents of SARA.

Thank you, Principal Deputy Undersecretary Jones, for your consideration of our request to extend the online distance education waiver to the end of the 2020-21 academic year. If you have any questions, please connect with me at (916) 446-7626 or at kristen.soares@aiccu.edu. I look forward to working with you on this and other issues facing higher education.

Sincerely,



Kristen Soares
President

1. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/24/colleges-lay-groundwork-fall-or-without-pandemic>
2. <https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/040320UPDATEDGuidanceInterruptStudyRelCOVID19>