



NOV 22 2005

United States
Department of
Agriculture

VETERINARY SERVICES MEMORANDUM NO. 548.4

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

SUBJECT: Veterinary Services' (VS) Distance Learning (DL) Policy

Veterinary
Services

TO: VS Management Team (VSMT)
Directors, VS

Washington, DC
20250

I. PURPOSE

Implementing the President's Management Agenda is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), mission priority. The President's Management Agenda includes expansion of electronic Government (eGovernment) to simplify and unify government-wide operations, including education. To support the Presidential eGovernment initiative for "etraining," VS is establishing a policy, through this memorandum, to endorse the application and use of various DL technologies for continuing education purposes. This policy includes maximizing the use of the Agriculture Learning (AgLearn) Service for administering and taking online courses. AgLearn is USDA's Department-wide system for managing training records and training activity, including online courses.

This memorandum provides a standard set of guidelines for VS' DL policy. These guidelines will ensure that VS' position on DL is consistent with both APHIS' and VS' missions, which recognize that continual learning and balancing professional, personal, and community responsibilities are critical to success.

II. GENERAL

VS employees should be given adequate or appropriate opportunities to participate in continuing education programs, as well as to complete legislatively mandated courses, such as the USDA-sponsored Incident Command System 100 and 200 online courses. Through DL, VS employees can view and participate in lectures and online courses from various remote locations specifically set up to accommodate them (e.g., satellite seminars or videoconferences broadcast in training rooms or conference rooms). Accommodations can also be made on an individual basis (e.g., using work or personal computers to view CD-ROMs or net conferences).

III. GUIDELINES

A. Definitions

1. Distance Learning



Safeguarding American Agriculture

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Federal Relay Service
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1-800-877-8339

DL allows VS employees to engage in learning opportunities from remote, non-central locations, such as their work site, thereby reducing or eliminating employee travel and time away from work, home, and family. DL includes correspondence courses, courses delivered by CD-ROM, and courses that are technology-dependent (e.g., Internet, intranet, audio- or video-conferencing, and web-based [online] courses). For the purposes of this policy, DL refers exclusively to distance learning events that are applicable and relevant to an employee's job function or career development path and that are consistent with VS' mission.

2. Mandatory Training

For the purposes of this Memorandum, mandatory training refers to learning events that employees are required to complete in compliance with USDA or APHIS policy or other legally enforceable requirement.

Mandatory training falls into two broad categories: non-technical or technical. Non-technical training is typically general in nature and not job specific. Examples of non-technical training include: civil rights training (a USDA policy); supervisory training (an Office of Personnel Management policy); and ethics training (a Federal policy). Technical training typically relates to specific employee job knowledge and/or skills. Examples of technical training include: Basic Epidemiology Training (a VS National Animal Health Policy and Programs requirement); and Export Certification Training (a VS National Center for Import and Export (NCIE) requirement).

B. Eligibility Requirements

All VS employees, full and part time, are eligible to participate in DL events commensurate with their job function, certification requirements, legislative mandates, and learning contracts or equivalent. Accordingly, they should be provided reasonable opportunity to engage in DL events on the job, to the extent that participation in such events is practical, feasible, and consistent with mission priorities. When possible, employee participation in DL events should be permitted during regular work hours, particularly if the DL event is: (1) mandated by legislation through USDA, APHIS, or VS; (2) required to fulfill job qualification requirements (e.g., certification or re-certification of particular skills); and/or (3) authorized by the employee's supervisor.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITIES

VS managers and supervisors should ensure fair and equitable enforcement of VS DL policy.

A. VSMT

The VSMT establishes and enforces VS policy regarding the application and use of DL.

B. Supervisors

VS supervisors should provide their employees with reasonable access to DL education opportunities that support VS' mission to safeguard animal health and promote continuing education. In addition, supervisors should ensure that employees complete mandatory training as required. As previously noted, mandatory training can be non-technical or technical. As a general rule, non-technical training (e.g., civil rights training; supervisory training; ethics training) requires about 1-2 hours on average to complete. Due the nature of technical training, estimated time allowances vary widely, ranging from a few hours to 40 hours or more. As an example, the Basic Epidemiology Training Course requires at least 40 hours to complete, whereas the NCIE Export Certification courses require 6-10 hours to complete. For this reason, supervisors should pay close attention to the estimated time durations that are usually provided with training announcements.

Supervisors should be flexible when determining whether employees should be allowed to participate in DL events during regular work hours. In instances where the DL event is mandated by VS or higher authority, employees should be allowed to participate, with due compensation for the time spent in training in accordance with APHIS guidelines, as applicable.

C. Employees

VS employees are encouraged to seek opportunities for continuing their education through reasonable and achievable means and to notify their supervisor when such opportunities arise. With respect to DL, employees may be required to provide periodic reports of progress, as well as documentation certifying successful completion. In all cases, employees are expected to put forth their best effort to derive the maximum benefit from their DL experiences.

D. Information Technology Support (ITS) Services

Various ITS resources are available to provide technical support to VS employees in the application and use of computer-based, telecommunications, and other DL delivery technologies. Among these resources are the VS ITS group, which operates under the VS Chief Information Officer. VS employees should contact their local VS ITS customer service representative, when necessary, for support in such areas as IT security, user account and access control (e.g., eAuthentication), equipment troubleshooting, etc. Additional ITS resources are available, including the AgLearn online help desk, the APHIS

Technical Assistance Center, and telecommunications host organizations (e.g., net conferencing support).

E. Professional Development Staff (PDS)

PDS provides training and system administration support to VS employees engaging in DL events, including training taken on AgLearn. As part of its mission, PDS also establishes, promotes, and implements DL events in accordance with VS policy and other legislative mandates.

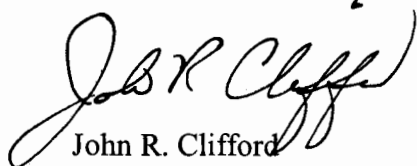
V. RELATED DL WEBSITES

The following websites provide additional information on the requirements, application, and use of DL within VS:

- A. AgLearn Learning Management System: <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/>.
- B. APHIS Mandatory Non-Technical Training: Go to http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/non_technical_training.html and click on the Mandatory Non-Technical Training for APHIS Employees link.
- C. VS Training: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/training/>.

VI. POLICY DEVIATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS

The intent of this policy is to encourage and support the application and use of DL as a viable means of facilitating continuing education efforts of VS employees. It is important to recognize, however, that deviations and exceptions to this policy will be necessary from time to time for various reasons, including mission priority, schedule conflicts, staff shortages, equipment difficulties, and access issues. Any employee who is interested in DL but cannot participate for any reason should notify his/her supervisor. If possible, supervisors are encouraged in such instances to employ alternative methods for achieving VS' mission and commitment to continuing education. Supervisors should also notify VS PDS, who will raise these issues with the VSMT for resolution. In general, inquiries, suggestions, or concerns regarding VS DL policy or the application and use of DL in general or in specific instances should be directed to VS PDS.



John R. Clifford
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Veterinary Services