North Carolina Real Estate Commission

CONTINUING EDUCATION ELECTIVE COURSE APPROVAL GUIDELINES

Contents:

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This booklet contains specific recommendations for elective course development and approval; however, it does not contain all rules, requirements, and information affecting course sponsors and instructors. It is not, nor is it intended to be, a replacement or substitute for reading the Commission's Real Estate Education Rules (21 NCAC Subchapter 58H). It is essential that all prospective sponsors, instructors, and elective course developers read the complete Real Estate Education Rules thoroughly – with special attention to Section .0400 (Continuing Education) before attempting to use the information in this booklet.

This material is provided to supplement the Commission's rules concerning elective course subject matter and criteria for elective course approval. The **subject matter guidelines** are intended to assist prospective course sponsors in determining whether the content of a particular course (or proposed course) is likely to be found acceptable by the Commission. The **course development guidelines** contain suggestions on developing acceptable courses, and the **course submission guidelines** summarize the submission and approval process. The final section of this document, the **distance education guidelines,** addresses the requirements for courses proposed to be taught by any method other than live, in-person, in-class instruction.

PART 1: CE ELECTIVE COURSE SUBJECT MATTER GUIDELINES

Basic Requirement for Elective Course Subject Matter

Continuing education elective courses shall cover subject matter related to real estate brokerage practice and offer knowledge or skills that will enable brokers to better serve real estate consumers and the public interest. [Commission Rule 58H .0407(a)(1)]

Key Elements of the Criteria

A proposed elective course must satisfy the following key elements of the subject matter criteria that are discussed below.

1. **A proposed elective course shall cover subject matter related to real estate brokerage.**

   A. **Courses must generally address subject matter that is considered to be part of the body of real estate knowledge that real estate agents are expected to possess.**

   Listed below are various examples of acceptable topics chosen from Commission-approved elective courses. These were chosen to illustrate the wide range of acceptable topics available to course developers. The examples of acceptable topics are listed under general subject area categories (in bold) which are generally too broad to be acceptable topics.

Examples of ACCEPTABLE Topics	
Agency Agency Forms and Practices Buyer Representation	**Finance** Residential Financing Options Understanding Lending Procedures
Appraisal Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) Most courses approved by the NC Appraisal Board	**Investment** Investment Analysis of Office Properties Real Estate Investment Fundamentals
Brokerage Practices Listing Procedures Navigating Tricky Transactions Performing a CMA/BPO	**Land Use** Zoning Basics
Client Specialization Expectations of Affluent Buyers/Sellers Military Residential Specialist Working with Seniors	**Legal Issues** Misrepresentation: Case Studies Top Legal Issues for Brokers
Commercial Real Estate Brokerage Commercial Real Estate Fundamentals Managing Commercial Real Estate	**License Law and Commission Rules** Top Disciplinary Complaints

Examples of ACCEPTABLE Topics	
Construction/Building Design Residential Construction Basics Sustainable Housing & Building Green	**Miscellaneous** Mortgage Fraud and Predatory Lending Property Inspections Real Estate Ethics Risk Management Short Sales "Staging" Real Estate for Sale
Contracts (Sales) Guide to Sales Contract Preparation Sales Contracts and Addenda	**Property Management** Legal Issues for Property Managers Residential Property Management
Environmental Issues Healthy Homes Understanding Mold	**Risk Management** Liability Reduction for Residential Agents Protecting Client Data
Fair Housing Fair Housing Case Studies	**Taxation** Taxation of Investment Property Tax-Deferred Exchanges

B. Many courses address subject matter that is useful to real estate agents but that clearly does not meet the basic standard cited in 1. above, such as the examples below:

Examples of Unacceptable Topics	
Professional Development Stress Management Understanding Body Language Effective Time Management Personal Financial Management Effective Interpersonal Communication Improving Your Personal Image	**General Skills** Computer Basics Introduction to the Internet MLS Data Entry
General Business Administration/Management Personnel Management Marketing Principles of Management Accounting	**Non-Real Estate Topics** Product "Branding" Feng Shui Economic Development Principles of Business Leadership
Topics not Directly Related to Real Estate Practice Guidelines for First-Time Homebuyers Managing In-House Corporate Real Estate Holdings	

2. A proposed elective course shall offer knowledge or skills that will enable brokers to better serve real estate consumers and the public interest.

The second key element of the subject matter criteria focuses on the "consumer protection" aspect of continuing education. The primary purpose of mandatory continuing education is to benefit real estate consumers. If the acquisition by a licensee of the knowledge and skills taught in a proposed course will directly contribute to this consumer protection goal (and the course satisfies the other criteria), the course is acceptable. This means that knowledge of the topic should have a direct bearing on the licensee's ability to protect and serve consumers' interests. However, if the principal beneficiary of the knowledge/skills taught in the course is the licensee rather than the consumer, and any benefit to the consumer is merely incidental, then the course is not acceptable.

> **Examples of Unacceptable Topics** (Real Estate Topics Directly Related to Brokerage Practice that Do NOT Directly Contribute to Consumer Protection)
> - Achieving Financial Stability
> - Expanding Your Real Estate Business
> - Dealing with Client/Customer Objections
> - Persuasive Real Estate Presentations
> - Efficient Real Estate Office Operations
> - Prospecting ("Farming") for Listing
> - REALTOR® Board Orientation

Notes:

- *As a general rule, it is best to select a fairly specific topic and address that topic in depth*, or to select the most important points relating to a topic and focus on those points.

- While a "review" of basic points of law, principles, or practices for a reasonable portion of a CE elective course is acceptable, *the course should also attempt to expand the students' knowledge/skills by focusing on (a) recent changes, (b) applications of principles and procedures to situations encountered in practice, or (c) special problem areas, or (d) specialized areas of practice such as commercial real estate brokerage or property management.*

- Although some licensees attending CE courses may not be actively engaged in real estate brokerage, the vast majority of licensees attending CE are active agents, and courses should generally be designed for active licensees. An effective instructor should be able to adjust the level of instruction to fit the needs of a class dominated by inactive agents.

PART 2: CE ELECTIVE COURSE DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

STEP ONE: Understand What is Required

The first step in sound development of an elective course for continuing education is knowing exactly what is required for approval by the North Carolina Real Estate Commission. In addition to the subject matter guidelines contained in Part 1, read Commission Rules 58H .0406 and 58H .0407 thoroughly for complete details regarding criteria for elective course approval. As far as actual materials are concerned, in developing the proposed course, you must produce the following:

(1) Substantive real estate information which shall consist of **at least four hours of instruction** and offer **four CE credit hours**;

(2) A copy of the **Course Guide** (or **Instructor Guide**), which shall include
 A. course objectives
 B. learning objectives for each topic
 C. a timed outline
 D. instructional methods/aids to be employed

(3) All materials that will be provided to students (**Student Materials/Manual**), which must provide the information to be presented in the course.

The **Student Materials** must provide, in **narrative or text form**, all the information to be presented in the course. In other words, the **Student Materials** must contain the narrative details of the substantive information to be presented in the course. This requirement shall not be satisfied by providing students with only a course outline or with print copies of a PowerPoint presentation.

The **Student Materials** should be current, accurate, explanatory of the topics covered, consistent with course learning objectives, grammatically correct, logically organized, and presented in an easy-to- read format. The scope and depth of the information presented must be appropriate in view of the course learning objectives and time allotments. The quality of the student materials should be comparable to that of professionally produced educational materials.

STEP TWO: Choose an Appropriate Topic

The second step in CE elective course development is choosing an appropriate topic. Commission Rule 58H .0407 and Part 1 of this document explain appropriate elective course subject matter. [See Part 1: CE Elective Course Subject Matter Guidelines, pages 1-4]. It is suggested that the developer perform some basic research into licensee needs/desires for elective courses (e.g., polling of students in existing CE courses). It would also be helpful to take note of the subject matter covered in courses that have already been approved and where the sponsors of those courses are operating.

STEP THREE: Write Instructional (Learning) Objectives

The third step in course development is formulating your instructional (learning) objectives. Deciding to develop a course can be compared to deciding to take a trip. Just as you need to determine a destination for the journey's end, you must determine the ultimate goal of your proposed course. Instructional objectives define what the student will be able to do upon completion of the course. Remember that instructional objectives are required for each major topic. A single instructional objective for the entire course is not sufficient.

In considering the end result of a proposed course, it may be helpful to study Benjamin Bloom's Hierarchy of Cognitive Skills (also known as "Bloom's Taxonomy"). "Bloom's Taxonomy" consists of six levels of thinking skills ranging from low order thinking skills (knowledge, comprehension) to high order thinking skills (application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation). A brief discussion of each thinking skill follows:

Knowledge, the lowest order of thinking, is the possession of information just as it is presented and requires only that the learner remember, recognize, or memorize information.

Comprehension is the translation of information into the learner's own words, a level of understanding beyond mere recall.

Application is the level at which critical thinking begins. The learner is required to assimilate information and apply it in a different/new situation than that of its original presentation.

Analysis is the ability to separate information into its basic parts and understand the relationship of the parts to the whole.

Synthesis is the ability to combine information from different sources to form a new idea. Synthesis requires original and creative thinking.

Evaluation, the highest order of thinking, requires learners to make judgments about, or determine the worth of, something according to standards the learner designates.

As a general rule, CE elective courses should sharpen those higher order thinking skills rather than focus on the lower level. The following list of words will help simplify the process of writing instructional objectives and provide measurable outcomes. "As a result of this instruction, students will be able to . . ."

KNOWLEDGE	COMPREHENSION	APPLICATION	ANALYSIS	SYNTHESIS	EVALUATION
define	discuss	apply	analyze	combine	assess
describe	explain	classify	breakdown	create	critique
identify	interpret	compute	categorize	design	determine
list	paraphrase	demonstrate	differentiate	devise	judge
name	summarize	modify	discriminate	integrate	measure
recall	translate	produce	relate	transform	support

STEP FOUR: Develop Detailed Course Outline

The fourth step in course development is constructing an outline of your proposed course. To extend the analogy from Step Three, if the proposed course is a journey with the objectives as destination, then the outline is your road map of how to get from "Point A" to "Point B."

The content of the proposed course can be outlined in many ways: sequentially, topically, simple to complex, etc. Regardless of the organizational method employed in constructing your outline, it is essential that it be as detailed as possible. A brief topic outline is not sufficient. A sentence outline is strongly preferred.

Once the detailed outline is complete, it will likely be apparent if the topic is too basic, broad, general, or otherwise inappropriate. *At this point, should you have any questions/concerns at all regarding the suitability of a topic, call the Commission office and ask to speak with the Continuing Education Officer.* It is better to learn about a major subject area problem at this stage than after you have devoted significant time to course development. Many questions about the appropriateness of proposed subject matter can be answered at this stage. Remember, however, that it will be impossible for the CE Officer to advise you at this stage on whether or not the substantive information you propose to present will be found appropriate since you have not yet developed the substantive details.

STEP FIVE: Determine Proposed Time Allotments and Instructional Methods/Aids

After the detailed outline is complete, the fifth step in course development involves working the additional Instructor Guide requirements into that outline. Specifically, this step includes determining the time allotments for each major topic, deciding when to break, and selecting the appropriate instructional delivery method(s) and/or instructional aid(s) to employ.

The Commission requires that the proposed course involve a minimum of four classroom hours of instruction on acceptable subject matter. A classroom hour is defined as 50 minutes of instruction and 10 minutes of break time. In determining time allotments and breaks, consider the difficulty of the material.

Regarding instructional methods/aids, unless the applicant can demonstrate that straight lecture is the most effective instructional method for the course, *the Course/Instructor Guide should provide for the use of appropriate variety of instructional methods and instructional aids intended to enhance student participation, attentiveness, and learning.* Examples of instructional methods and instructional aids that may be appropriate include, but are not limited to, class discussion, role- playing, in-class work assignments, PowerPoint presentations, and video recordings.

STEP SIX: Write Course Narrative and Assemble Student Materials and Course/Instructor Guide

The sixth step in course development is writing the course narrative and assembling the Student Materials and Course/Instructor Guide. The Student Materials should be, in essence, a textbook which is used by the students and the instructor. Additionally, a Course/Instructor Guide must be provided containing the detailed course outline into which all other required elements have been inserted: time allotments and break placement, learning objectives for each major topic, instructional methods/aids to be employed, as well as any other additional instructor notes. [*See Step One, p.5*]

In writing the detailed course narrative, be aware that *the substantive information to be presented must be provided in sufficient detail to demonstrate that the information is current, accurate, complete, and otherwise appropriate.* The education/experience level of the instructor(s) will not suffice as a substitute for narrative details, and Commission staff will make no assumptions about the specific information that will be presented. Every course must be fully developed prior to approval. This does not mean that the materials must contain every word to be spoken by the instructor; however, all key points to be made/discussed must be addressed in sufficient depth for Commission staff to determine that the information is current and accurate, and that the instructional level is appropriate. An outline with an occasional sentence or phrase is not sufficient, not is a listing of key points in incomplete sentence form. In order to fairly evaluate whether the course meets approval criteria, staff must review the details of the substantive information in narrative form.

The easiest way to assure that the narrative is written with adequate detail is to use the specific instructional objectives and the detailed outline (developed in Steps 3 and 4) and imagine that you are writing course material for someone other than yourself to use in teaching the course. As an additional goal, you might strive to produce materials of such caliber that they will become resource/reference materials for licensees for years to come.

In assembling your Course/Instructor Guide and Student Materials, you should include appropriate cover pages, tables of contents, and acknowledgment pages for each document. If copyrighted materials are to be used in the proposed course, the course developer should obtain the specific permission of the copyright holder for such use and the materials should be used in a form approved by the copyright holder. Additionally, appropriate citations for copyrighted materials should appear in the course materials. Similarly, even if you use materials that are in the public domain (not copyrighted), appropriate credits should be included.

STEP SEVEN: Proofread Materials and Obtain an Independent Review

This step is a very important and often overlooked step in developing a proposed course. The Commission has received several submissions resembling "rough drafts," which have required not only evaluation but editing/marking for correction. Commission staff simply does not have the time nor the personnel to perform proofreading/editing.

In addition to the writer proofreading his/her work, it is advisable that the writer ask someone else who is knowledgeable of the subject matter and grammatical principles to read the material. Having another person's viewpoint is helpful in the editing/revising stage.

STEP EIGHT: Edit - Clarify - Revise

It is a rare individual who gets it right the first time. Naturally, after the proofreading and independent review step is completed, it is likely that corrections and changes will need to be made. Once you've pinpointed those problem areas, correct them!

STEP NINE: Name That Course

The final step in course development is selecting a title for your course that accurately reflects the course content. Many course developers like to use eye-catching or cute-sounding course titles to distinguish their courses. While attention-getting titles may have some benefit, such titles also are problematic when they give the licensees absolutely no clue as to the course subject matter. As some licensees choose courses based on the subject matter, potential students may be lost if a course title does not reveal the course's subject matter.

PART 3: CE ELECTIVE COURSE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

General Information and Instructions for Submitting Applications for Approval of Elective Courses

Rules and Guidelines

Prior to completing an application, each prospective course sponsor should read the North Carolina Real Estate Commission's **Real Estate Education Rules (21 NCAC Subchapter 58H)** and the *Continuing Education Elective Course Approval Guidelines* (this document) thoroughly. Each prospective instructor must be familiar with the rules regarding instructor conduct, performance, and responsibilities.

Approval Process; Prior Approval Required

Approval of an elective course includes approval of the sponsor and of the course itself. Course sponsors will be approved only in conjunction with a specific course or courses.

Course sponsors must obtain approval in writing from the Commission prior to advertising or otherwise representing that any course is or may be approved for real estate continuing education in North Carolina.

Application Forms

All application forms for requesting approval of continuing education courses are available on the Commission's website (www.ncrec.gov) under FORMS \ Education Forms.

These applications are fillable webforms and are electronically submitted as soon as an applicant completes the form appropriately and pays the required non-refundable application fee. (No fee is required if the applicant is a government agency or an accredited community college, junior college, or university located in North Carolina.)

Application fees are nonrefundable. If you have questions regarding the suitability of a course for approval, please call to discuss such concerns with the CE Officer (919.875.3700) before submitting an application.

Be aware that part of the application process includes uploading the course material for review if the course has not received approval previously, and an applicant will not be allowed to complete the application process and pay the application fee if the upload step is skipped.

Processing Time - When to Submit

The time required to process an elective course application varies depending upon the type of application submitted and the time of year it reaches our office. Applications for newly developed courses are the most time consuming. If a proposed course application for a new course is received before April or after June, and the course clearly satisfies all criteria, it will

normally be reviewed and approved within 3 to 4 weeks. During the April through June period, that timeframe may double. Review of a proposed course application for a new course where the course does not fully satisfy all criteria may take even longer.

Applications received from approved sponsors to schedule previously approved courses can generally be processed in just a few days, but during the April through June period, it may take a bit longer.

Regarding how far in advance to submit course applications for approval, if you have a tentative "class date" in mind, allow sufficient time for processing and review by Commission staff, for correcting any potential problems in course materials, and finally for adequate advertising of your course offering(s).

Terms of Approval

Commission approval of elective courses and sponsors expires on the June 30 following the date of issuance. In order to assure continuous approval, sponsors shall file an electronic application for renewal of approval annually between May 15 and June 30 which shall include a $50 fee for each course the sponsor wishes to renew.

Other Requirements and Conditions

The Commission reserves the right to demand verification of any relevant information concerning the sponsor or the course(s) prior to making a determination on any application.

The applicant should make and retain a copy of each completed application and other information submitted to the Commission. The completed application and all material submitted to the Commission become the property of the Commission and may not be returned to the applicant.

PART 4: CE DISTANCE EDUCATION GUIDELINES

Introduction

Distance education encompasses many different delivery methods. Because of the variety of delivery systems, it is essential that stringent rules and guidelines be in place for distance education in order to maintain and protect the quality and integrity of the continuing education program.

The purpose of this section is to provide some explanation of the Commission's standards for distance education to developers and sponsors of prospective distance education courses and to ensure that any distance education courses subsequently approved will meet the needs of the licensees while complying with established Commission Rules governing the continuing education program.

Commission Rule 58H .0406(d) and (e):

(d) If the elective course will be taught by any method other than live, in-person, in-class instruction, the applicant shall submit, along with the application for original approval:
 (1) a full copy of the course on the medium to be utilized for instruction;
 (2) a description of the method by which the sponsor will verify and record student attendance;
 (3) a list of hardware and software or other equipment necessary to both offer and complete the course;
 (4) the contact information for the technical support service for the course; and
 (5) a copy of the student orientation and course tutorial information.

(e) If the course will be taught by any method other than live, in-person, in-class instruction, the applicant shall, if requested, make available, at a date and time satisfactory to the Commission and at the applicant's expense, all hardware and software necessary for the Commission to review the submitted course. In the case of an Internet-based course, the Commission shall be provided access to the course at a date and time set by the Commission and shall not be charged any fee for such access.

In its review of distance education courses, in addition to subject matter, the Commission will also consider the following elements, each of which will be discussed separately:

- Interaction
- Assuring/Assessing Student Mastery
- Classroom Hour Equivalency
- Technical Support
- Instructor Qualification
- Student Orientation Information

INTERACTION

Interaction, for our purposes, is defined as involvement and/or participation by the student in the learning process and may take one of three forms: student with instructor, student with other student(s), or student with a computer program. As an example, if the course is delivered via the Internet, students may be asked to interact with the instructor and/or other students through e-mail and chat-rooms. If the course is delivered via a computer program, students may be asked to work problems or answer questions based on the information presented.

ASSURING STUDENT MASTERY

To be approved for continuing education elective credit, distance education courses must include some method of checking for student understanding and assuring mastery of the information. This is most frequently accomplished through requiring students periodically to answer a series of questions designed to measure their grasp of the material.

In a computer-based course, appropriate testing and remedial processes to assure student mastery of the subject material may be accomplished by questions asked periodically throughout each section of the course and at the end of each section of the course. Questions may be presented in various formats including True-False, Matching, Multiple-Choice, and Fill-the-Blank. If a student selects an incorrect answer, the student must be given the correct answer and the rationale for that answer. Then, at some point before the end of that particular section, the student must see that question again (preferably in a different format) and respond correctly. Mastery is determined when the student answers a pre-determined percentage of the questions correctly. For example, one computer program may use a pass rate of 90% overall; another might require students to answer all the questions correctly twice before they're allowed to advance. Whatever the passing percentage, when it is met, the student is allowed to advance to the next module containing new information where the whole process is followed again. If the student does not perform well on a section, the student is required to go through the information again and is tested again before gaining access to new information or before being considered to have completed the course

CLASSROOM HOUR EQUIVALENCY

Virtually all distance education courses are self-paced, meaning the students determine when they will work on the subject matter and for how long. For these reasons, developers must have established classroom hour standards.

Commission Rule 58H .0407(a)(2) requires that all continuing education elective courses involve a minimum of four classroom hours, or 200 minutes, of instruction. Therefore, all distance education courses must be designed so that the average student would need roughly 200 minutes total in order to successfully complete the material.

Computer-based courses must employ a timing mechanism which begins timing once the student has logged into the system and has opened the first screen that contains the subject material. Should the student remain inactive for longer than is reasonable without either

advancing to the next screen and/or answering the questions which must be posed periodically throughout the course, the timer must stop. What is a "reasonable" amount of time for student inactivity with the computer program may vary from subject to subject.

Acceptable studies or field tests should involve a minimum of 10 different individuals having completed the course and a record of their times documented. The average of the 10 (or more) completion times must be a minimum of 200 minutes.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Students must be provided access to technical support. For delivery methods in which technical problems may be likely, such as web-based training, technical support should be available in a number of ways. For example, students in a web-based course may be provided a phone number and an email address for a member of the sponsor's technical support staff. A website that presents 'Frequently Asked Questions' for users of the software could partially fulfill this requirement.

INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATION

Per Commission Rule 58H .0407:

"Continuing education elective courses shall…be taught only by an instructor who possesses at least one of the following:
(A) a baccalaureate or higher degree in a field directly related to the subject matter of the course;
(B) three years' full-time work experience within the previous 10 years that is directly related to the subject matter of the course;
(C) three years' full-time experience within the previous 10 years teaching the subject matter of the course; or
(D) education or experience or both found by the Commission to be equivalent to one of the above standards."

STUDENT ORIENTATION INFORMATION

The sponsor must provide student orientation information which includes:

1. overview of subject matter;
2. course learning objectives;
3. requirements for receiving satisfactory credit, including completion deadline (June 10th at 11:59 p.m.);
4. course fee and refund policy (if any);
5. instructor name(s) and how the instructor may be contacted;
6. course materials (manual, disk(s), etc.);
7. computer hardware/software requirements;
8. directions for installation and for tutorial;
9. a "troubleshooting" guide; and
10. instructions for obtaining technical support.