

Distance Education Policy
Approved by APC March 22, 2013

Policy Statement:

Georgia College & State University supports distance education as a way of maintaining and extending quality programs that complement traditional course offerings of the University. Courses delivered in a distance education format must be equivalent in content, level, rigor, and overall educational quality to courses taught in traditional face-to-face classes.

Definitions:

Distance Education (DE): In accordance with SACS-COC, Georgia College defines distance education as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.

The University System of Georgia has established the following guidelines for the reporting of distance education.

- a. *Online or fully online* 95% to 100 % of the course is taught online. The class may meet for a one-time orientation or for exams.
- b. *Partially online* 51% to 94% of the course is taught online.
- c. *Hybrid* 25% to 50% of the course is taught online.
- d. *Technology enhanced/face-to-face* 0% to 24%. Technology may augment instruction, but no class sessions are replaced by technology. This category may be used as a document repository.

Learning Management System (LMS): A software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of education courses. Desire2Learn is the USG approved LMS.

Keywords:

Distance education, online delivery, hybrid courses, & technology

Reason for the Policy:

SACS-COC mandates that institutions must have a distance education policy to govern the delivery of instruction via distance education.

The creation and delivery of courses through distance education raises questions about control, evaluation, quality, rights, and responsibilities that may not be adequately addressed by existing policies and procedures. This policy document addresses these issues and provides the institution with a definitive statement indicating that courses delivered via distance education must be equivalent in content, level, rigor, and overall education quality to courses taught in traditional face-to-face classes.

Proposed Outcomes:

Ensure consistent delivery of distance education courses.

Ensure that academic content, level, rigor, and overall education quality for courses taught via distance education are equivalent to those taught in regular classroom settings.

Applicability of the Policy:

The distance education policy applies to all credit bearing courses taught via distance education.

Related Policies:

- Georgia College Credit Hour Policy, Approved by the University Senate February 15 2013 (Motion 1213.APC.002.P)
- SACS-COC, *Distance and Correspondence Education*.
<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Distance%20and%20correspondence%20policy%20final.pdf>

Supporting Information:

- Academic Affairs Handbook, Board of Regents, University System of Georgia
http://www.usg.edu/academic_affairs_handbook/section2/handbook/C731/#p2.3.7_external_degrees

Responsibilities:

I. Instructional Units

- The academic instructional units and faculty will retain control and authority over the initial decision of whether to offer courses or programs through distance education.
- The substantive content of the courses or programs, as well as the staffing of those courses or programs, is the responsibility of the academic instructional unit who has primary responsibility for maintaining the quality and integrity of all instruction in its area.
- Faculty who provide distance education must meet the same qualifications as faculty who provide regular classroom instruction.

II. Central Administration

- The LMS provides the mechanism for faculty to teach a course totally online, partially online, or in a hybrid method. A faculty member also has the ability to incorporate features of the LMS in face-to-face courses.
- The Department of Instruction Distance Education & Advanced Services (IDEAS) administers and maintains the day-to-day operation of Desire2Learn and trains faculty, staff and students on the proper use of the LMS.
- The Department of IDEAS reports within the division of Academic Affairs.

Procedures:

All Georgia College & State University policies, procedures, standards, and guidelines for face-to-face courses and instruction are applicable to distance education instruction unless noted otherwise.

Courses conducted through distance education, should be structured so that the total number of minutes of instruction and out of class work is equivalent to that of a traditional face-to-face class.

Fully and partially taught distance courses must be approved through a formal institutional review process and must demonstrate that learning outcomes and level of student achievement are equivalent to a traditionally delivered course.

In consultation with the University Senate, Chairs Council, and Council of Deans, the Provost's Office is charged with developing and maintaining applicable procedures to implement the distance education policy. Procedures will be developed to support faculty who teach distance education courses and to ensure that all distance education courses display a level of academic rigor and student engagement commensurate with the face-to-face experience. Given the changing nature of distance education and because of policy changes at the University System of Georgia (USG), institutional, and accrediting levels, these procedures may change over time.

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Approval Date

Requested date: April 30, 2013