# DISTANCE EDUCATION PROCEDURES GUIDE

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# DEVELOPMENT OF NEW HYBRID AND ONLINE COURSES

## REQUEST APPROVAL TO TEACH A HYBRID OR ONLINE COURSE

1. Distance education courses are to be developed as part of a strategic plan that benefits the school. Requests for new development should be submitted one year (three semesters) prior to the proposed start date of the course.
   Requests for approval follow the process below:
   - The CETL director will submit a call for proposals once each semester.
   - Departments that wish to offer distance education courses should submit a proposal for the distance offering(s) to the school's curriculum committee for approval.
   - Approved proposals shall be submitted the Dean of the school.
   - The Dean will assess the overall benefit of the proposed course to the school and university in determining whether to approve the proposal.
   - Deans will submit approved proposals to the CETL via electronic form.
   - The CETL director will submit the complete list of proposals to the Provost for review.

## CERTIFICATION TO TEACH DE COURSES

The CETL offers a seven-week certification course called *Fundamentals of Online Teaching (FoOT)*. Distance education instructors must complete the course prior to teaching DE courses at the University. Instructors may submit evidence of prior training to the Director of the CETL to request an exemption from the requirement to take FoOT.

Faculty who continue to teach distance education courses will complete the Applying the Quality Matters Rubric (APPQMR) workshop within two years (six semesters) of completing FoOT. The workshop introduces participants to the Quality Matters rubric and the course review process. The choice of this workshop as the second step in training aligns with the University's adoption of the Quality Matters rubric, which is used to determine if a course's design meets minimum standards.

As of November 2019, the cost to take the two-week, online version of the APPQMR workshop is $90. The cost is billed to the schools by the CETL. Faculty may opt to take the one-day, face-to-face version of the workshop. A minimum of six participants is required for the workshop to take place. The cost billed to the schools is $25 per participant.

After completion of the APPQMR workshop, faculty must complete six hours of professional development related to online instruction every three years. Training may be offered by departments, the CETL, or third parties.

## COURSE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT STEPS

This process begins two semesters prior to the first offering of the course. Course development should be completed one semester before the course start date.

### PROCESS OVERVIEW

1. The instructional designer schedules a kick-off meeting with the course designer (usually a faculty member) to discuss:

a. The course design process and the course development timeline, which can be modified to fit the course designer's needs.
b. The Blackboard template for distance education courses.
c. The Quality Matters (QM) rubric.
d. How to use a course blueprint document.
e. How to estimate course workload.

2. The faculty member submits the blueprint in sections to the instructional designer, according to the agreed-upon schedule.
   a. Instructional designers will review the blueprint using QM standards as a guide and discuss the findings with the course designer.
   b. Faculty will make revisions to "essential" elements (as defined by QM) that do not "meet expectations." Examples of revisions that may be required include revising module-level objectives or adding student-to-student interactions.
3. The instructional designer creates the course sandbox and updates the course template to match the blueprint.
4. The faculty member develops the first unit of the course, which includes completing tasks such as:
   - Inserting links to instructional materials
   - Creating learning activities and assessments
   - Writing transparent assignment directions
   - Creating multimedia files, such as recorded videos and narrated slide shows
   - Creating discussion forums and journals
5. The faculty member and instructional designer review the first unit together to discuss unexpected hurdles, questions, and the timeline for developing the remaining units/modules of the course.
6. The course must be completed by the agreed-upon deadline to allow instructional designers to conduct an internal Quality Matters review. The course must "meet expectations" on the internal QM rubric, which requires that the course earns 85% of the available points and meets all "essential" requirements.
7. Any required revisions must be completed according to the development timeline.
8. No later than two weeks prior to the start of the live session, the sandbox will be copied to the live course site. Faculty can request that CETL complete the course copy or do it themselves using the export/import functions. **Note: CETL will copy courses for the online MBA, BBA, and M.Ed. programs, as well as the 7-week GEC courses developed with Ease Learning.*

## MODIFICATION OF APPROVED DE COURSES

Faculty should anticipate refreshing an online course when updates are made because of a textbook change or every 2-3 years, depending on department, school, and University needs. Cyclical updates to courses should take place as part of a program review, as specified by the 21st Century Guidelines for Distance Education (see Appendix 6 of the Distance Education Policy).

Because courses that have been developed in partnership with an instructional designer have been reviewed and "meet expectations" according to the QM rubric, changes to objectives, content, learning activities, and assessment should be reviewed by an instructional designer at the CETL to confirm that alignment remains intact. Faculty should contact the CETL for more information. Faculty will make updates to course content in the sandbox version of the course so a clean sandbox of the course always exists. Previous versions of a live course should not be modified at the conclusion of the semester. CETL staff will copy courses from the updated sandbox.

### REVIEW OF EXISTING HYBRID AND ONLINE COURSES

1. Existing DE courses will be reviewed over time based on department and school needs. Deans will communicate information about course reviews to faculty.
2. Internal reviewers will determine whether the course meets expectations by earning 85% of the available points and all "essential" components.
3. A copy of the review report will be delivered to the course designer, who will make any necessary revisions according to the timeline established by the dean, CETL staff, and the course designer.

*For additional information, see "Modification of Approved DE Courses."*

## FACILITATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES

Many DE instructors report that teaching online courses is more time-intensive than teaching face-to-face courses. Expect to log into email and online courses daily to monitor student activity. The DE Policy states that students can expect a response to questions within 48 hours.

### COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

Manage the amount of communication you handle on a daily basis by implementing strategies such as:

- Sharing information with students through an Announcement in Blackboard. Announcements are also delivered to students via school email and the Blackboard App, if they use it.
- Requiring students to post questions that are not personal to the a "Q&A" discussion forum. The instructor and students share the responsibility of responding to the questions that are posted. When students contact you with questions that may be applicable to others, request that they post to the discussion forum so you can respond.
- Referring students to available information. Resist the urge to provide answers to questions when the information is already available. For example, refer students to the syllabus or a particular lesson in the course.

## FEDERAL RULES ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

Effective July 1, 2021, federal rules related to the use of Title IV funding for distance education courses contain more specific guidance about both instructor and student activity in distance education courses. The updated rules reflect a concern on the part of the Department of Education that institutions misunderstand the distinction between distance education and correspondence courses. Whereas the Quality Matters rubric is used to assess course design, the federal rules address instructor facilitation of a course.

This section contains more detail about how to comply with federal rules, which are outlined in the DE Policy under "Course Development and Facilitation."

## DEFINITIONS

The terms in this section are defined in 34 CFR Part 600.2.

*Examples and non-examples adapted from "Regular and Substantive Interaction Primer" by Everett Community College, which is shared with a CC-BY license.*

## ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Active participation by a student in an instructional activity related to the student's course of study. Engagement must consist of more than logging into a class and is centered on learning rather than "check the box" activities designed for the purpose of taking attendance. Student completion of technology-mediated work, such as adaptive problem sets, constitutes academic engagement; however, limiting academic engagement to this type of work is insufficient as distance education courses must also contain "regular and substantive" interaction (defined below).

## REGULAR INTERACTION

Instructor-initiated opportunities must be provided to students on a "predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course." The opportunities, such as a regularly scheduled virtual meeting, **must** be scheduled in advance. If no such opportunities are scheduled, the course is defined as "correspondence" rather than "distance" education. *Document regular interaction in the course syllabus.*

- ✓ You post a weekly announcement that you have written specifically for the class
- ✓ You actively facilitate a required online discussion for every course unit
- ✓ You hold a one-hour online review session every other week during the course
- ✓ You provide individualized feedback on assignments according to the timeline established in the syllabus
- ✓ You are present during regularly scheduled office hours
- ✗ You send a welcome message during the first week of class and a check-in message around week seven
- ✗ You encourage students to participate in an online review session before the mid-term and final exam
- ✗ You ask students to let you know if they want to schedule a meeting during scheduled office hours
- ✗ You encourage students to participate in an online review session before the mid-term and final exam

## SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION

This entails meaningful instructor-initiated engagement of "students in teaching, learning, and assessment" and inclusion of at least two of five actions specific to course content or assignments (direct instruction, providing feedback on coursework, providing information or responding to questions about coursework, facilitating discussion about course content, or other activities approved by SACSCOC). More information about the five options for creating substantive interaction is provided below.

### PROVIDING DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Direct instruction consists of synchronous (real-time) activities that allow for interaction between the instructor and students. Examples of direct instruction include but are not limited to:

- Face-to-face lectures in a hybrid course
- Virtual class sessions
- Participation in lab or studio work
- Synchronous meetings scheduled in a fully online course

## ASSESSING OR PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON COURSEWORK

The manner in which instructors provide feedback and on what timeline is defined in the course syllabus. Because assessing coursework may be limited to assigning grades, the University's DE Policy specifies that faculty will provide "timely, specific, and actionable feedback" to students based on the following findings:

- Student improvement is contingent upon receiving feedback that explains what they did right or wrong and specific direction on how to improve. Such feedback should be provided before students submit subsequent work.
- Student reception to feedback diminishes over time. Students are more receptive to prompt feedback (within 1-2 days). When unable to provide detailed feedback immediately, let students know so they do not assume that you have forgotten about them or that they completed "busy work." You can also provide high-level feedback to the entire class and provide more in-depth feedback to individuals at a later date.
- Students perceive feedback accompanied by a grade as judgmental rather than informative. When possible, provide feedback on student work prior to releasing the associated grade.

✓ You provide individualized feedback on assignments according to the timeline established in the syllabus
✓ You record and post a short video that addresses the three mistakes that most students made on their last exam
✗ You add numeric grades to the course gradebook
✗ A student submits a quiz or homework assignment that is automatically graded

## PROVIDING INFORMATION OR RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ABOUT COURSEWORK

Instructors are not required to provide information to students in a prescribed manner. Information can be conveyed in many ways, including virtual meetings, email, and commenting through various educational technology (EdTech) tools.

✓ You post a weekly announcement that you have written specifically for the class
✓ You send a message previewing concepts introduced in the next unit and listing questions for students to have in mind when reading the textbook chapters
✓ You respond to a student's question about a primary source via email
✓ You and a student meet online to review the feedback you provided on an essay
✗ You recommend that a student join SGA or attend the President's Picnic
✗ You write a letter of recommendation for a student
✗ You remind students of the course attendance policy

## FACILITATING A GROUP DISCUSSION REGARDING THE CONTENT OF A COURSE

Discussions may occur synchronously or asynchronously. Asynchronous instruction may be hosted in a variety of tools and is not limited to use of the Discussion Board in Blackboard. In addition, use of asynchronous discussion does not require that the instructor monitor discussion activity in real time. However, it is possible to assign group discussions without meeting the facilitation requirement. Substantive interaction requires faculty-initiated activity and interaction with students. Therefore, facilitating group discussion entails following the conversation and being present in the conversation.

Facilitators ensure that active and thoughtful discussion develops by:

- ✓ Monitoring the discussion forums daily. Examples include:
  - Acknowledging student contributions
  - Summarizing key points
  - Following up with non-participants
  - Addressing inappropriate participation within the discussion forum itself
  - Summarizing key points that have been made.
- ✓ Asking guiding questions rather than providing answers. Examples include:
  - Weaving different student comments together by pointing out similarities and/or differences in the arguments.
  - Asking two students who have presented different viewpoints to respond to each other.
  - Asking students to clarify or elaborate on their positions.

- ✓ You post an example from last night's Rangers game in the course's 'Real-World Physics' discussion to illustrate the concept of coefficient of restitution
- ✗ You post a discussion question or assign a wiki and do not participate or comment except to enter a numeric grade in the Grade Center
- ✗ You post to the course's 'General Topics' discussion thread lamenting the outcome of last night's Rangers game

### OTHER FACULTY-INITIATED ACTIVITIES

Activities not specified in the four categories above may be utilized and counted toward the minimum of two activities so long as those activities meet the following criteria:

- Instructor-initiated
- Related to the coursework
- Can be reasonably described as meaningful

## MONITORING OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT:

Instructors are not required to track student activity on a minute-by-minute basis; however, instructors must be attentive to student progress throughout the course to "promptly and proactively" engage with the student about their academic performance. It follows then that instructors must adhere to syllabus expectations related to providing feedback on student work within a specific time frame and that instructors maintain and check the Grade Center throughout the semester.

Instructors *must* reach out to students about non-participation or non-attendance before dropping them from a class. Instructors are to enter a note in EAB Navigate to document that students are not academically engaged.

- ✓ You ask a student to visit you during office hours or to schedule a phone call or videoconference with you to discuss their progress in the class or on specific assignments
- ✓ You use Retention Center functions in Blackboard to receive notifications when a student's performance dips below a specific marker so you can reach out to the student immediately
- ✗ You post an announcement about an upcoming assignment deadline
- ✗ You tell students to check My Grades for an update on their progress and tell them to reach out to you if they have concerns

## COMPLIANCE

The following suggestions will help ensure the University remains in compliance with Title IV rules related to Distance Education.

a) Require DE instructors to attend a training on the updated policies and procedures. Include attendance policy reminder.
b) Require use of Retention Center functions in Blackboard. When enabled the system generates automatic notifications to faculty when a student does not meet or exceeds established markers.
c) Implement pre-semester course checks conducted by CETL. Example checklist items: Retention Center set up, number of points in Grade Center matches points listed on the syllabus, and inclusion of assignment due dates.
d) Create an additional section on the Annual Report for DE instructors. Faculty would provide evidence of implementing best practices in DE, supported by data from end-of-course evaluation survey data.
    i. Add a set of questions to the end-of-course survey, such as:
        i. The instructor provided feedback on assignments in a timely manner.
        ii. The instructor responded to questions within the timeframe established in the syllabus.