DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY
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Distance Education

POLICY STATEMENT

Delta State University is committed to providing students from diverse backgrounds high quality distance education opportunities that are consistent with its role and mission. Following established best practices and applicable IHL Policy, the university will employ appropriate learning technologies and delivery formats to offer a variety of courses and programs.

All distance education (DE) courses are taught by faculty following the same standards, prerequisites, and requirements as on-campus sections of identical courses. All Delta State University policies and procedures, standards, and guidelines for on-campus programs and instruction are applicable to distance education instruction, unless noted otherwise (see University Policy Manual; Student Handbook). Distance education courses are comparable to on-campus courses in terms of course descriptions, expectations, and student learning outcomes.

DEFINITIONS

Asynchronous Instruction

Instructional activities that do not require instructors and students to be engaged at the same time.

Course Delivery

Online Course – a course is considered to be online when 100% of the course instruction, faculty-student and student-student interactions are *is* available via the University's learning management system. Some online courses may require proctored testing at approved testing sites and/or other course activities such as practicum experiences.

Hybrid Course – a regularly scheduled course that includes a combination of online and face-to-face meetings.

Traditional Course – a course is considered traditional when instruction is delivered on-site with face-to-face interaction between the instructor and student. The traditional course may be web-enhanced.

Web-enhanced – a course is considered web-enhanced when classes meet face-to-face and utilize the University's learning management system to augment the course. The syllabus and/or other materials are available through the University's learning management system. Students may be asked to submit some assignments electronically.

Course Design Template

A university approved Canvas template for all online, hybrid, web-enhanced, and face-to-face courses with common components, criteria, and guidelines that faculty can augment with their needs and requirements.

Course Evaluation Rubric

A set of standards used to determine the quality of an online course.

Course Instructional Design

Instructional design refers to the analysis of learning needs and the systematic approach to developing an online course in a manner that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills to the learner through the use of a variety of instructional methods, which cater to multiple learning styles, strategies, and preferences.

The four basic steps in instructional design include analysis, definition of goals and learning objectives, design of learning activities, and evaluation of course and student performance.

Course Syllabus Template

A university-approved template in a pre-set format utilized by faculty in the development of syllabi for all courses.

Distance Education

A formal synchronous or asynchronous educational event 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.

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

A software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs. DSU's current LMS is Canvas.

Online Program

A program where 100% of the courses are delivered online. For accreditation purposes, some programs may have attendance requirements for program completion such as proctored examinations or practicum experiences.

Synchronous Instruction

Instructional activities that require instructors and students to be engaged at the same time.

ABBREVIATIONS

DE – Distance Education

DEC – Distance Education Committee

IHL – Institute of Higher Learning

LMS – Learning Management System

OIT – Office of Instructional Technology

PROCEDURES and RESPONSIBILITIES

I. **University Distance Education Committee**

The University Distance Education Committee (DEC) consists of two members selected from each college and school. The members of the committee serve two-year terms. The committee chair will be selected by the committee members and serve through the academic year and preside over the first meeting of the subsequent academic year. The Provost will appoint a dean to serve on the DEC as an ex-officio member. The Director of the Gertrude C. Ford Center for Teaching and Learning will serve as an ex-officio member, and the Director of Instructional Technology from the Office of Information Technology will serve as a non-voting advisor. The committee is responsible for developing policies, making recommendations, and promoting quality assurance including infrastructure, best practices, and faculty and student support for all distance education programs and courses.

II. **Curriculum**

A. **University Principles**

1. Provide access to high quality programs to meet the educational and training needs among a diverse populace within and beyond the geographic service region of the University.

2. Evaluate student learning outcomes and conduct continuous evaluation of DE programs and courses.

B. **Approval and Review Process for Distance Education Courses**

Distance education courses are designed to meet the same learning outcomes and

level of rigor as traditional courses. All online courses are delivered through the university-approved learning management system (LMS). Faculty utilize the university approved course design template to develop and teach online courses. The approved course design template consists of common components, criteria, and guidelines that faculty can augment according to the needs and requirements of each college/school department.

In addition, the college/school department guidelines are followed to ensure course content is organized in a logical system that meets other required standards, such as accreditation, and to ensure course content is easily accessible to the student.

All DE courses will be reviewed based on identified best practices and accepted national standards as outlined by Quality Matters (QM) and will be conducted according to the process outlined below. Existing DE courses will be reviewed periodically. All new DE courses must be approved for development by the department/division chair and, if applicable, by the college/school dean before the course can be designed and scheduled for review. The following review process will typically take four to six months to complete; however, an expedited process may be available based on program goals and current course design.

1. The faculty member responsible for the course must first satisfy the initial approval process of the department/division and, if applicable, college/school.

2. Chairs will identify and submit to their dean a list of online courses they request to be developed and reviewed during the current academic year. Deans will compile the requests from their unit and submit their requests to the director of Instructional Technology. Based on funding and the urgency of the requests, the Provost, in consultation with the director of Instructional Technology and deans will approve the courses to be developed and reviewed based on resources available.

3. The person(s) responsible for the course development and/or revision must complete all current university trainings required for teaching and designing DE courses.

4. After successful completion of all required trainings, the person(s) responsible for the course will develop/revise the course using the approved DSU Canvas shell, QM standards, with assistance from the Office of Information Technology (OIT). After the course is developed/revised, the course will be submitted for peer or external review.

5. After a successful formal review, the course is approved for offering as the department/division chair deems appropriate.

6. New courses must submit a *Course Action Request* form to the college/school dean and proceed through the regular new course approval process.

7. A newly designed online course can only be offered after passing the formal review and after the instructor has completed required training to teach online.

Departments/Divisions should make plans to redesign and review current online courses on a rotating schedule following items 2-4 in the process above.

The role of the peer or external review is as follows:

1. Provide guidance and resources to the faculty member on best practices of course design and QM standards and the use of Canvas.

2. Conduct a thorough review of course design and content organization based on QM standards and Higher Education Rubric.

3. Provide a feedback report including recommendations on how to meet QM standards.

Other considerations of the review:

1. The peer or external reviewer is provided by the director of Instructional Technology.

2. The focus of the review is on the design of the course, the reviewer does not comment on course content.

III. **Department/Division Chair**

    A. **Responsibilities**

1. The chair ensures appropriate departmental procedures are followed.

2. The chair ensures all faculty teaching DE courses are aware of the Distance Education Policy and Procedures.

3. The chair ensures faculty teaching DE courses receive the appropriate university-required training.

4. The chair ensures that all DE courses use the appropriate university-approved templates and adhere to the Distance Education Policy.

5. The chair reviews all DE courses according to the official university timeline.

IV. **Faculty**

    A. **Responsibilities**

1. Recruit, support, and enable faculty members to effectively design, develop, and teach DE courses.

2. Maintain the human and technical resources and network infrastructure necessary to reliably support and deliver distance education.

3. Assess emerging methods and new technological avenues for providing and delivering efficient and effective distance education.
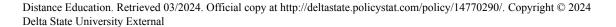
    B. **Teaching Responsibilities**

Faculty who teach in DE programs and online courses meet the same qualifications

as faculty who teach in traditional courses at Delta State University. Faculty who teach in DE programs and online courses have the same Faculty Rights and Responsibilities as faculty who teach in traditional courses. Faculty teaching in DE programs and online courses are evaluated using the University's evaluation procedures and instruments.

Faculty teaching online are responsible to:

1. Complete all current university trainings required for teaching and designing DE courses. The current annual training requirements can be found at [location with hyperlink].

2. Provide regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor in the online course.

3. Ensure the rigor of programs and quality of instruction are maintained within online courses (e.g. course design, course content, delivery of instruction, evaluating student progress, assessing learning outcomes, timely communication with students, and substantive instructor-student, student-student, and student-content engagement).

4. Participate in annual training related to updated technologies and/or pedagogical techniques for teaching online.

5. Review and revise DE courses every semester in which a particular course is taught to ensure currency and relevancy of materials and content.

6. Respond to student communications within two business days, with sensitivity to assignment deadlines.

7. Use the tools in Canvas that address the whole class when responding to a student (unless it's a personal response) so that all students can benefit from the explanation (for example, the discussion board or Announcements and course Q&A page).

8. Engage the class directly on course content at **least** once a week. This may include scheduled readings, videos, or PowerPoint slides you have planned for content presentation. Direct participation in group discussions with guidance or facilitation related to course content is required to demonstrate substantive engagement. While students posting or discussing readings, assignments, or other student posts is an excellent way for the students to engage online **student posts do not demonstrate substantive engagement between faculty and students**.

9. Maintain a friendly, respectful environment in the online classroom, ensuring that student and faculty interactions follow basic principles of netiquette.

10. Monitor student activity and login events through the Canvas Course Analytics tool and contacts students who register low participation.

11. Post assignment, quiz, test, and participation grades in Canvas. Grades must be available to students through the Gradebook in Canvas.

C. **Required Training**

    1. New (full-time, part-time, or adjunct) faculty are required to complete new faculty training modules.

    2. Faculty teaching DE courses will complete annual training in the delivery of DE courses as specified by the University.

    NOTE: Current training requirements can be found at https://deltastate.instructure.com/courses/21609

D. **Additional Training and Support**

    1. The Gertrude C. Ford Center for Teaching and Learning provides programs, workshops, and individual consultations to support all teaching responsibilities.

    2. OIT provides ongoing professional development opportunities in strategies and technology tools that ensure best practices in DE courses.

    3. OIT provides technical support for delivering, developing, or revising DE courses.

    4. The LMS hosts resources to assist faculty in designing and developing online courses.

Responsible Office:

Office of Academic Affairs

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Faculty Rights and Responsibilities
- Grades and Credits Policy
- Academic Affairs Procedures and Guidelines: Expectations of Faculty Teaching Online
- Academic Affairs Procedures and Guidelines: Requirements to Move an Existing Program to Online Only Delivery

Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date