

## Distance Education Policy

### Purpose of Policy

Southeastern recognizes the vital role of distance education (DED) in meeting student needs and enriching the learning experience at Southeastern. It also recognizes that delivering quality DED courses and programs requires specialized knowledge and skills. The Distance Education policy provides a framework for faculty, administrators, and students seeking to participate in DED courses and programs at Southeastern. Both [SACSCOC](#) and the [Louisiana Board of Regents](#) provide definitions of DED that will be adhered to by this policy.

This document is not intended to supplant any existing policies set forth by the University. The development, delivery, and evaluation of DED courses and programs take place in the context of the policies and procedures of all existing academic programs.

### Definitions

- **Distance education (DED).** A formal educational process in which *the majority* of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course and/or program occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or other digital media if used as part of the distance education course or program. ([SACSCOC Distance Education and Correspondence Courses Policy Statement](#)), ([Louisiana Board of Regents - Academic Affairs Policy 2.12: Delivery of Degree Programs Through Distance Learning Technology](#))

Southeastern further delineates DED into the following two categories:

- **Online.** A DED format in which 100% of the instruction in a course or program occurs asynchronously when students and instructors are not in the same place.
  - **Online course.** Instruction is delivered 100% online asynchronously.
  - **Online degree program.** Degree program is delivered 100% online asynchronously.
  - **Online student.** A student who is enrolled in a 100% asynchronous online degree program.
- **Hybrid.** A DED format in which 51% - 99% of the instruction in a course or program occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.
- **Quality Matters at Southeastern (QM).** Based on Quality Matters standards of best practice, research and instructional design principles, QM is a faculty-centered, peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of DED courses.

- **Learning Management System (LMS).** The official software system adopted by the university for the delivery of courses.
- **Southeastern Online.** This office has been designated to oversee the design, development, and maintenance of DED courses and programs at Southeastern. It also assists in the administration of fully online academic programs, as well as faculty certification.
- **Teaching Online at Southeastern Course (TOS).** Based on Quality Matters standards of best practice, research and instructional design, successful completion of this course is required to certify faculty to teach DED courses.

## Policy Procedure

### Approval Process for DED Course Delivery

All DED courses at Southeastern adhere to the same academic expectations required of their traditional counterparts. In addition, all DED courses must meet the certification requirements set forth by Quality Matters and evaluated by Quality Matters at Southeastern to ensure standards specific to design, delivery and assessment are met.

### Approval Process for DED Programs

Southeastern's [Submission of Changes in Curricula Policy](#) must be followed when creating new DED programs or offering existing programs through DED. In addition, the policies set forth by SACSCOC and the Louisiana Board of Regents regarding the [delivery of new degree programs](#) or [offering existing programs](#) through the DED format must also be followed.

### Department Head Information

It is the responsibility of the department head to enforce the guidelines established in this policy. Considerations for DED offerings should include (a) program needs, (b) student needs, (c) department/college/university goals concerning distance versus face-to-face delivery of individual courses and degree programs, and (d) resource availability.

The department head is also responsible for approving a faculty member's request to deliver a DED course and should consider the following before granting that request:

- Certification status (completion of the *Teaching Online at Southeastern* course)
- Prior annual evaluations of teaching
- Prior development or training in teaching online
- Skills associated with teaching online (e.g., computer skills, file management, word-processing, presentations software, email, internet, social networking, learning management systems)

The department head should consider the faculty member's annual evaluation of teaching results with regard to the DED course before granting continued permission to deliver the course. Faculty are evaluated in accordance with the guidelines and procedures outlined in the [Evaluation of Faculty Policy](#).

### Faculty Information

As with traditional courses, faculty are responsible for and exercises oversight over DED instruction, ensuring the rigor of courses and the quality of the curriculum and instruction. Faculty must ensure that DED opportunities adhere to the quality standards outlined in this policy. When considering faculty to deliver an online or hybrid course, [SACSCOC states](#), "An institution offering distance learning courses/programs ensures that there is faculty qualified to develop, design, and teach the courses/programs." Therefore, faculty must be certified through the Teaching Online at Southeastern

course or one that is deemed equivalent by the dean, department head and Southeastern Online and have DED courses certified through Quality Matters at Southeastern.

### Compensation and Course Load

Distance education courses are typically part of the faculty member's regular teaching load, with the same rate of compensation as traditional courses. Any exceptions, such as teaching an overload, may be offered at the same rate of compensation as traditional courses. Exceptions are considered on a case-by-case basis and must be approved by the department head, dean, provost. See [Southeastern's Teaching Loads Policy](#).

### Office Hours

As indicated in [Southeastern's Office Hours Policy](#), each faculty member is expected to maintain a minimum of ten office hours a week during a regular term and three hours during a summer session. These hours are posted on the syllabus in the learning management system, the faculty member's door, and kept by the department head. During the fall and spring semesters, up to five virtual office hours shall be kept by faculty engaged in DED courses. For the summer semester, up to three virtual office hours are required. For virtual office hours, faculty must be available via some mode of synchronous online communication (e.g., chat, video conferencing, email, etc.).

### Ownership of Materials

Southeastern follows the guidelines outlined by the University of Louisiana System (ULS) with regard to ownership of materials and utilization of revenues derived from the creation and production of intellectual property. Faculty must keep in mind copyright, trademark and licensing issues when designing DED courses and therefore should be familiar with [Southeastern's Copyright Policy](#). Examples include the use of copyrighted photographs, graphics, text selections, audio clips from a song, or video clips from a movie. As Southeastern's policy states, the usual permissions must be acquired and documented by the faculty member. When in doubt about copyright ownership, it is preferable to be overly cautious. If copyright permission cannot be obtained or if ownership is questionable, faculty should substitute other resources where copyright permission is clear and obtainable, or substitute resources that are in the public domain.

### Response Time

Faculty engaged in 100% online courses shall maintain a 24-hour maximum response time (excluding weekends, holidays, or extenuating circumstances) for returning student emails and are expected to display high levels of social and cognitive presence as well as high quality writing skills.

High quality social presence may include:

- Faculty access forums and interact with students several times a week.
- Faculty posts a minimum of once a week.
- Postings are directed toward learners.
- Faculty demonstrates professional behavior and evidence of respect for diversity and the views of others.

High quality cognitive presence may include:

- Faculty stimulates discussion.
- Reasoning shows well-developed analytical skills and critical thinking.
- Faculty encourages students to achieve higher standards.
- Faculty always provides adequate supporting details and examples.

High quality writing skills may include:

- All postings are well written and demonstrate accurate spelling and grammar, clear organization, careful editing, conciseness and clarity.

## Training and Professional Development

In accordance with [SACSCOC](#), the institution must provide training to faculty delivering DED courses. Southeastern Online and the Center for Faculty Excellence provide training regarding course design, implementation and assessment through in-person and virtual workshops and individual consultations in a format that prepares faculty to develop courses that are in accordance with Quality Matters at Southeastern.

## Course Information

### Accessibility

As determined by federal and state laws associated with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1](#), all courses will be designed following the set requirements for accessibility. All content for the course presented in the designated LMS and any outside or third party resources must meet minimum accessibility standards to provide all students equal opportunities to learn.

### Course Interaction

Distance education courses must provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty and among students. All students are expected to participate regularly. Multiple means of student-faculty interaction and student-student interaction are expected. This can include faculty requiring and monitoring students' regular participation, scheduling regular group meeting times, and encouraging students to: post messages to one another about the coursework, attach documents to email messages, visit peer websites, and participate in on-going listserv groups and synchronous chat rooms. Increased interaction among students and between students and the faculty promotes involvement leading to discovery, student-driven episodes, and student-defined questions.

All courses should include regular substantive interaction (RSI) among students and faculty through an appropriate form of online media. The three aspects of RSI are interaction between 1) instructor to student, 2) student to instructor, and 3) student to content.

Communicating high expectations explicitly and efficiently keeps students on-task and involved. Distance education faculty expect regular connections with students using a variety of interactive methods. Student-faculty interaction may unfold synchronously, during face-to-face meetings, telephone, video conferencing, and online chat rooms; or asynchronously, with regular mail, recorded audio or video messages, email, and other means where interaction can occur.

Faculty should strive to meet the individual needs of students and ensure active learning in DED coursework by incorporating a variety of course experiences that address diverse learning styles.

### Course Materials

Designers of DED courses at Southeastern are encouraged to explore creative ideas for course materials through research of best practices, communicating with colleagues, and contacting content providers.

Southeastern utilizes textbook rental and retail systems to provide academic texts and supplemental materials. Textbook Rentals accommodates any required hardbound textbooks, which have a useful life of two or more academic years. Books not eligible for adoption by the rental system and support materials such as workbooks, reference manuals, or dated materials are sold by the University bookstore. Faculty communicate their needs to the appropriate personnel in the same manner as for traditional courses. Departments and faculty adhere to the [Selection of Textbooks Policy](#) for textbook adoption.

When students are required to purchase books and/or materials, faculty should make this information available as soon as possible so that students may purchase from any source they choose. Courses that have accompanying technology

through publishers or software companies must be approved through the Center for Faculty Excellence to ensure compatibility with the LMS and other applicable software.

Supplementary materials can be made available in electronic format. Library personnel can assist faculty with electronic reserves, interlibrary loans, and online databases that can be accessed electronically. Instructors provide students with directions on how to access library materials such as books, periodicals, journal articles, etc.

### Course Syllabus

The course syllabus must be posted in the LMS and must contain the same information as traditional courses, (See Welcome Back Memo posted each semester on the Provost's website), along with the following additional components:

- Virtual office hours
- Technological requirements for the course, including any software requirements
- Procedure for resolving technical complaints, including contact information for technical support
- Preferred method for contacting faculty member, e.g., email, phone, text message
- Netiquette expectations
- Faculty member's response time for student communications [Faculty engaged in 100% online or hybrid courses are required to maintain a 24 hour maximum response time (excluding weekends, or extenuating circumstances) for returning student emails.]
- Procedure for determining attendance as required for financial aid reporting
- Student participation/interaction requirements
- Information on DED Library Services

### Credit Hour Requirement

Courses designed for DED delivery must reflect the contact hours and instructional time commitments in accordance with Southeastern's [Credit Hour Policy](#).

### Learning Management System

Southeastern's designated learning management system is used for all DED course delivery and grade keeping, unless otherwise approved. To provide a consistent DED experience for the student, faculty shall follow the university's most current academic template.

## Student Information

### Academic Integrity and the Code of Conduct

Students in all classes, regardless of delivery format, must adhere to Southeastern's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) and to all policies and standards published in [Southeastern's Student Handbook](#).

### Student Readiness for DED

Distance education requires that students possess a set of skills and abilities in order to be successful. Technical, time management, and communication skills, along with reading and writing ability and the ability to work independently, have all been identified as prerequisites for readiness.

Students must be informed about these necessary skills and given an opportunity to complete a self-assessment of their skill level before enrolling in a DED course or program. [SACSCOC states](#) that a student enrolled in DED courses are required to be able to use the technology employed, have the equipment necessary to succeed, and are provided assistance in using the technology.

## Student Authentication

A secure login and pass code identification method is used to help ensure that students registering for DED courses/programs are the same as those participating in, completing and receiving credit for courses/ programs. A unique username/W# (secure login) and password (secure pass code) is received at time of enrollment, which is used for identification/authentication purposes for DED course work at no extra cost to the student. In addition to the secure login and pass code, multifactor authentication may be used to ensure that passwords are not compromised and to further strengthen the identity verification process. Faculty may use other means to authenticate the work of DED students (e.g., proctored exams, special software, web cameras). If a faculty member chooses to use additional means of authenticating work, students must be informed in writing at the time of course registration of any actual and/or projected costs. Additional student costs associated with verification of student identity/authentication of DED student work must be approved by the provost following a recommendation from the department head and dean of the course.

Proctored exams requiring the student to be at a Southeastern facility may be used in hybrid courses but not 100% DED courses.

## Student Privacy

Student privacy in all courses and programs regardless of delivery format is protected as per the Policies and Procedures Relating to the [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#) posted on the University's website.

*[End of policy]*