



# Southeastern Louisiana University

## Distance Education Policy

### Document History

Responsible Administrator: Provost

Responsible Office: Provost's Office

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### Purpose of Policy

Southeastern Louisiana University recognizes the advantages of providing learning opportunities that are not restricted by time, place, or method of delivery. In an effort to meet and ensure these standards exist in distance education at the University, the purpose of this document is two-fold:

1. To provide faculty and administrators a guide for developing and implementing distance education.
2. To communicate quality standards for the delivery and assessment of distance education at Southeastern Louisiana University.

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

### Important Definitions

- **Distance Education.** Distance Education is defined as a planned teaching/learning experience in which teacher and students are separated by physical distance and/or teacher-student interaction occurs through multiple modalities of existing and evolving media.

Distance education requires special techniques of course design, instructional techniques, assessment, and methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organization and administrative arrangements.

- **eLearning Unit.** The eLearning Unit consists of the administrative, academic, and technological personnel who coordinate the scheduling, infrastructure and delivery of distance learning courses and works closely with the academic departments to ensure the quality of distance education at Southeastern. Included in the Unit are members from the Center for Faculty Excellence and the Office of Online Learning. Appropriate members of the eLearning Unit or their designees are responsible for posting all electronically delivered courses on the Office of Online Learning's website.

The Center for Faculty Excellence, in coordination with appropriate members of the eLearning Unit, provides additional support in the area of distance education by providing the following services:

- Instructional design assistance
- Professional development opportunities in the areas of teaching and learning
- Workshops, information sessions, discussions, and webinars on a variety of distance education topics
- Instructional and technical support for electronic learning
- The production of audio, video, photographic and graphic media for instructional use

- Assistance with the appropriate pedagogical use of technologies
- **Course Alignment Process (CAP).** Based on national standards of best practice, research and instructional design principles, CAP is a faculty-centered, peer review process that is designed to certify the quality of online and blended online/face-to-face courses. It consists of four steps:

**Step 1** – Faculty Certification through the *Teaching Online at Southeastern* course

**Step 2** – Course Design and Approval for Delivery

**Step 3** – Course Delivery (2 semesters)

**Step 4** – Course Certification Review

The Course Alignment Specialist, located in the Office of Online Learning, oversees the faculty and course certification process. CAP employs a modified version of the national QMTM rubric, specific to institutional needs, to guide the review of all distance learning courses. The CAP rubric addresses course quality in the following categories:

- |                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ○ Course Overview and Introduction | ○ Learning Objectives         |
| ○ Assessment and Measurement       | ○ Resources and Materials     |
| ○ Learner Support & Engagement     | ○ Course Technology           |
| ○ Accessibility                    | ○ Professional Communications |

## Modes of Delivery

A variety of electronic instructional delivery modes are available at Southeastern, including:

1. Online: Offered via the Internet using a Learning Management System (LMS)
2. Blended or Hybrid: Combines face-to-face classroom instruction with distance education activities
3. Telecourse: The Southeastern Channel produces and airs telecourses from a variety of academic disciplines for broadcast on the regional television channel and over the web via “Video on Demand” through the LMS.
4. Compressed Video: Occurs in real time and allows the instructor to communicate with remote site sections of the class via two-way audio/video. Instructors and students hear and see each other live from each site.

The University schedule of classes indicates what courses are being offered via distance education and the delivery format (Internet, compressed video, or telecourse). Alpha characters attached to the section number of distance education courses also indicate information about the course.

Online courses are designated as:

- I – Courses taught **50% or more** by Internet and a portion taught **on campus**
- Q – Courses taught between **25% and 49%** by Internet. The remaining portion taught **on campus**
- IC – Courses taught **50% or more** by Internet and a portion taught as **compressed video**
- XQ – Courses taught between **25% and 49%** or more by Internet and a portion taught **off campus**
- XI – Courses taught **50% or more** by Internet and a portion taught **off campus**
- NT – Courses taught **100% Internet** (Note: These courses will **NEVER** meet face-to-face.)

Telecourses are designated as:

- TV – Courses taught utilizing the Southeastern Channel

Compressed video courses are designated as:

- C – A compressed video course taught on campus
- XC – A compressed video class taught off campus
- IC – Course taught 50% or more by Internet and a portion taught as compressed video

## Policy Procedure

### Faculty Expectations, Qualifications and Evaluations

#### Expectations

As with traditional courses, Southeastern's faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education instruction, ensuring both the rigor of courses, curriculum, and the quality of instruction. Blended courses offered less than 25% via distance education may be required to follow the Distance Education Policy at the discretion of the department head. With noted differences between teaching distance education courses and teaching courses using "traditional" methodologies, the decision to use distance learning must be made on a course-by-course basis, with consideration given to the content of the course, the needs of the learners, and the flexibility of the delivery mechanism.

- **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 to accommodate student consultations. These hours are posted on the syllabus, the learning management system, and the faculty member's door, and kept by the department head. Up to five online office hours shall be kept by faculty engaged in 100% online courses. For online office hours, the faculty must be available via some mode of synchronous online communication (e.g., online chat, instant messaging, FaceTime, Skype, email, etc.).

- **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 is defined as the following:

- Instructor accesses forums, etc., several times a week.
- Instructor posts numerous times a week.
- Postings are directed toward learners. Instructor demonstrates professional behavior and evidence of respect for diversity and the views of others.

High quality cognitive presence is defined as the following:

- Instructor stimulates discussion.
- Postings are clear, original, and relevant.
- Reasoning shows well-developed analytical skills and critical thinking.
- Instructor encourages students to higher achievement.
- Instructor always provides adequate supporting details and examples.

High quality writing skills are defined as the following:

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

#### Qualifications

All faculty requesting to teach a 100% online or blended online/face-to-face course are required to show competence in online instruction by completing Steps I and II of the CAP:

##### Step 1

Faculty must meet ONE of the following requirements:

1. Completion of the *Teaching Online at Southeastern* certification course prior to the course being taught,  
OR

2. Completion of an equivalent training course approved by the Course Alignment Specialist and the faculty member's department head and dean.

## **Step 2**

Meet with Instructional Designer to discuss feasibility, begin course mapping, and determine technical needs. (Compressed Video or Telecourse faculty should meet with Southeastern Channel personnel.) Work with appropriate support team to develop course (Instructional Designer, Office of Technology, and Southeastern Channel).

Instructional Designer or Southeastern Channel personnel submits Course Proposal Approval Form (See Appendix A) to appropriate department head for departmental approval. Department notifies the Office of Online Learning once approved.

In addition, department heads must consider other factors, such as the following, in determining whether a faculty member is qualified to teach an online or blended online/face-to-face course:

- Prior annual evaluations of teaching
- Faculty development or training in teaching online
- Skills associated with teaching online (e.g., basic computer skills, database management, file management, word-processing, presentation software, email, Internet, social networking, learning management systems)
- Proficiency in the online course technology and design

## **Evaluations**

It is the responsibility of department heads to perform annual evaluations of their faculty whether they teach using a traditional format or a distance delivery format. Faculty are evaluated in accordance with the guidelines and procedures outlined in the [Evaluation of Faculty Policy](#).

## **Course Load, Compensation, and Ownership of Materials**

### **Course Load**

Distance learning courses are typically part of the faculty member's regular teaching load, with the same rate of compensation as traditional courses. Distance learning courses may also be taught as an overload, at the same rate of compensation as traditional courses taught as an overload. Any exceptions (e.g., reassigned time for developing courses using new distance technologies) are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and as per current procedure, must be approved by the department head, the dean, and the provost. See [Southeastern's Teaching Loads Policy](#).

### **Compensation**

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 found in the [Intellectual Property and Shared Royalties Policy](#).

### **Ownership of Materials**

Faculty must keep in mind copyright, trademark and licensing issues when designing distance education 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.

## Approval Process for Distance Delivery

All distance education courses at Southeastern are considered comparable to traditional courses and adhere to the same course standards, prerequisites, and requirements as traditional sections of identical courses.

To encourage high quality course offerings, proposals for creating new distance education courses and proposals for converting existing courses to a distance format are given careful review. Not only must distance education courses meet the same quality standards as traditional face-to-face courses, but additional review is necessary to ensure the appropriateness and feasibility of Southeastern's chosen eLearning format for teaching the course.

Distance education courses should be approved in the semester prior to the semester of delivery, to allow for sufficient instructor training and course development. Faculty requesting to teach an existing, certified, distance course for the first time must also be approved. If the existing distance course is not certified, faculty should follow the new course development guidelines.

The process for developing and/or requesting to deliver a distance education course is outlined below:

### Step 1

1. Faculty reviews and accepts requirements, steps and expectations outlined in the Distance Education Policy
2. Faculty requests approval from department head to develop course for distance delivery or teach an existing, certified course for the first time.
3. Faculty successfully completes the *Teaching Online at Southeastern* certification course or has completed an equivalent course approved by the Course Alignment Specialist and the faculty member's department head and dean.

Faculty certification is valid until there are substantive changes in the CAP Certification standards.

### Step 2

1. To develop a new course, faculty meets with Instructional Designer in the Center for Faculty Excellence to discuss feasibility, begin course mapping, and determine technical needs – enlisting appropriate contacts with the Office of Online Learning, Office of Technology (OT), Southeastern Channel, and the Library, as needed.
  - a. For a course to be delivered via compressed video or as a telecourse, the faculty member meets with Southeastern Channel personnel to discuss feasibility, begin course mapping, and determine technical and communication/presentation needs.
2. Instructional Designer or Southeastern Channel personnel submits a Course Proposal Approval Form to appropriate department head for approval. Department notifies the Office of Online Learning once the course is approved for delivery.

### Step 3

Course is delivered for two semesters with continued support, as needed, by the Center for Faculty Excellence, Office of Online Learning, Office of Technology, Southeastern Channel, and Sims Memorial Library.

### Step 4

After being delivered for two semesters, online courses must be officially reviewed for CAP Certification\*\* within the following academic year. If the certification requirements are met, the course as taught by the faculty member is so certified. If certification requirements are not met, the course may not continue to be delivered online until it meets CAP standards.

**\*\*Contact the Office of Online Learning for information on CAP Certification.**

## **Re-Certification Requirements**

Faculty changing more than 10-15% of a certified course must re-submit that course for review.

## **Responsibility of Department Head in the Approval Process**

The department head has primary responsibility for overseeing the scheduling of courses offered through the department each semester, and that includes the scheduling of the course delivery format.

Faculty members are required to secure department head approval to develop an online or blended course or teach an existing certified online course for the first time. The ability of the faculty member to offer the course using the approved distance delivery method depends on factors including but not necessarily limited to (a) program needs, (b) student needs, (c) department/college/university goals concerning distance versus face-to-face delivery of individual courses and degree programs, (d) the results of the faculty member's annual evaluations of teaching, and (e) resource availability.

The ability of the faculty member to continue to offer the course using the approved distance delivery method depends on factors including but not limited to (a) the results of the faculty member's annual evaluations of teaching, particularly with regard to teaching the course in question and the delivery method in question, (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.

## **Course Design**

Faculty will work with the Instructional Designer (for online courses) and the designated eLearning support team (e.g., Office of Technology staff, Southeastern Channel, Library) to design either an online course that reflects the components of CAP or a telecourse or compressed video course that reflects presentations appropriate for televised delivery. To provide a consistent online experience for the student, faculty shall follow the university's LMS template for online course layout.

Courses designed for distance education delivery must reflect contact hours and instructional time commitments in accordance with Southeastern's Credit Hour Policy and expected student learning outcomes that are equivalent to those for the same courses delivered through traditional formats.

## **Faculty Training**

For online distance education courses, the Center for Faculty Excellence and the Office of Online Learning provide training regarding course design and implementation. Training is provided online, in onsite workshops, and through individual consultations in a format that prepares faculty to develop courses that are in accordance with the Course Alignment Process (CAP). The Course Alignment Process is designed to (1) help faculty members align their distance education courses with operational outcomes in the relevant organizational context of their specified fields and (2) ensure course design reflects best practice quality standards and provides for a consistent environment and learning experience for the students.

For telecourses and compressed video courses, Southeastern Channel personnel provide information on any technical requirements and guidance on providing effective televised presentations.

## **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 component:

- Instructor's 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 instructor, e.g., email, phone, text message
- Netiquette expectations
- Instructor's response time for student communications [Faculty engaged in 100% online courses are required to maintain a 24 hour maximum response time (excluding weekends, or extenuating circumstances) for returning student emails.]
- Procedure for determining attendance
- Student participation/interaction requirements
- Information on Distance Learning Library Services

### **Student 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-instructor interaction and student-student interaction are expected. This can include instructors 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 instructor promotes involvement leading to discovery, student-driven episodes, and student-defined questions.

Communicating high expectations explicitly and efficiently keeps students on-task and involved. Distance education instructors expect regular connections with students using a variety of interactive modes. Student-instructor interaction may unfold synchronously, during face-to-face meetings, telephone conferences, video conferencing, and online chat rooms; or asynchronously, with regular mail, taped audio-video broadcasts, email, and the Internet.

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

### **Course Materials**

Designers of distance education 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. Instructors 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 printed or electronic form. 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 Assessment**

Southeastern evaluates the educational effectiveness of its distance education courses and programs to ensure comparability with face-to-face courses and programs.

Individual courses are expected to adhere to approved course descriptions and have similar expected student learning outcomes, regardless of the course delivery format. Student satisfaction is assessed through the Student Opinion of Teaching surveys delivered electronically during the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters, regardless of the delivery format of the class. The Office of Institutional Research provides the President and Provost with an annual report on student retention and grade distributions for each course, disaggregated by delivery format.

For academic programs that provide students with different delivery options for the entire program (e.g., entirely face-to-face; hybrid – 25% to 99% of required programs offered via a particular distance technology; 100% via a particular distance technology), the department online learning committee, under the direction of the department head, must ensure expected student learning outcomes and measures of those outcomes are identical across all delivery options. In addition, the results of those measures are compared across the different delivery formats.

## Student Requirements and Expectations for Distance Education

### Prerequisites and Readiness

The ability of a student to succeed in a distance education class depends on his or her ability to understand the class structure and technology. Informing students of what skills and technology are needed for particular distance education courses allows them the opportunity to do a self-assessment of their capability to succeed in the course.

Faculty complete the Distance Education Course Information Sheet outlining general information about the class, including specific skills a student should possess, hardware and software requirements necessary to participate in the course, and faculty contact information. At the time of course registration, students are required to review the Course Information Sheet, which also includes an online student readiness assessment (e.g., SmarterMeasure). Registration for the course constitutes the student's acceptance of the requirements necessary to participate in the course.

### Student Integrity and Authentication

Southeastern uses the SACSCOC-suggested secure login and pass code student identification method as an attempt to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the associated credit for the course or program. At the time of enrollment, students receive a unique username/W# (secure login) and password (secure pass code). This username/W# and password is used for student identification/authentication purposes for distance education course work at no extra cost to the student, with both the username/W# and password used for work submitted online.

In addition to the secure login and pass code method, faculty may use other means or technologies to authenticate the work of distance education students (e.g., proctored exams, special software, web cameras). If a faculty member chooses to use additional means of authenticating the work of distance education students, students must be informed in writing at the time of course registration of any actual and/or projected associated costs (e.g., cost of specialized software, estimated cost of web camera). Any projected additional student costs associated with verification of student identity/authentication of distance education 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 in 100% distance education courses.

### Academic Integrity and the Code of Conduct

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



## 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.

In addition, at the time of employment, all university employees sign a Confidentiality Agreement, indicating:

“... a variety of records and information must not be shared with, made available to or accessible by an persons other than professional associates with a need to know in the normal course and scope of work. Confidential information otherwise must not be discussed or shared without appropriate authorization.”

This agreement includes but is not necessarily limited to student course records (e.g., grades, other indicators of student performance), medical and/or personal information revealed by the student.

# Course Proposal Approval Form

To be completed by Instructional Designer on behalf of the faculty member.

Instructor Name

Your answer

Course (Include term and section)

Your answer

This instructor has visited the Instructional Designer to ensure course alignment in this course and is approved through the Center for Faculty Excellence to teach this course twice before going through the full course alignment process.

Yes

No

Instructional Designer assigned to this review:

Your answer

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