Distance Education

UNIVERSITY POLICY #250

Authority:
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SECTION 1: Scope

1.1 This policy addresses a variety of issues related directly to the development and delivery of distance education courses for use in credit or non-credit courses or in support of University-funded research. Ownership and copyright issues are also addressed here as well as resources the University will provide to developers and instructors. This policy also addresses guidelines to be followed in the development of courses intended for online delivery.

SECTION 2: General Information and Definitions

2.1 According to the Higher Education Opportunity Act, **distance education** is defined as education that uses one or more of the following technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor; and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies used may include: 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 videocassettes, DVDs, and CDROMS (PL 110–315, 14 AUG. 2008).

2.2 **Online course** refers to any distance education course in which 100% of the course content is delivered asynchronously by technological means. There are no synchronous, face to face, or on site attendance requirements. Online courses are designated as such in the schedule of courses.

2.3 **Hybrid course** refers to any course in which 50% or more but less than 100% of the course content is delivered by technological means. There are synchronous, face to face, or on-site attendance requirements. Hybrid courses are designated as such in the schedule of courses.

SECTION 3: Courses

3.1 Distance education courses will include the same outcomes and key assessments as course sections taught in a face-to-face format. The rigor of the courses will be consistent with the course level and credit hours without regard to delivery format.

3.2 Student access to distance education courses must be through the official Learning Management System (LMS) of the University. Exceptions must be approved in writing by the appropriate Dean and the Provost.

3.3 Technical support for online courses for faculty and students will be available through IT Services Help Desk and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Online Education at online@westliberty.edu.

3.4 Any course meeting the definition of distance education must be clearly identified as such in the schedule of classes. Any required meetings will be stated in the registration note and in the course syllabus.

SECTION 4: Course Development and Review

4.1 Online courses must be approved by the appropriate academic Dean and the Department Chair or Program Director and comply with Quality Matters Standards.

4.2 Online courses must be approved by the Distance Education Committee in accordance with their review guidelines and procedure. These guidelines shall be based on Quality Matters Standards or other standards as recommended or required by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC). The review guidelines will include an initial, informal review that will provide initial feedback to the developer.

4.3 Only approved online courses will be listed in the official schedule of courses. The deadline for approval shall be the Monday prior to the opening of pre-registration for the term in which the course will be offered.

4.4 Once a course is reviewed and approved, it may not be modified in structure or content without permission from the appropriate Dean, Department Chair or Program Director and the Distance Education Committee. Changes to content or structure will require a new review and approval prior to the course being offered again.

4.5 Responsibility for the academic component of distance education courses shall reside with the appropriate academic unit. The academic unit, in collaboration with the Distance Education Committee, shall monitor distance education courses for alignment with the standard practices, procedures, and criteria which have been established for traditional face-to-face courses including, but not limited to, faculty involvement in course development and approval, selection of qualified faculty to teach the course, determination of appropriate class size, and oversight of course offerings to ensure conformity with previously established traditions of course quality and relevance to programs. In no case shall section sizes for distance education courses be larger than those of the face-to-face version of the same course. Distance education courses shall

comply with the standards of Quality Matters or other evaluative criteria recommended or required by the WVHEPC.

4.6 The institution will provide, to a reasonable degree, appropriate technical support and required training for developers of distance education courses.

4.7 Online course development will be compensated at a fixed rate approved by the Provost and President of the University and published by the Distance Education Committee.

4.8 The development of content for online courses may be eligible for compensation based on prior approval by the Distance Education Committee, available funds and the curricular needs of the University.

4.9 The materials created by faculty members for distance education courses, done as work-for-hire, shall be co-owned by the University and faculty member both in copyright and use.

4.10 All online courses will align with the template and expectations adopted by the Distance Education Committee. Approval for any exception must be given by the Academic Dean, Provost, and Distance Education Committee, in writing, prior to development.

4.11 Each online course will undergo a review under the direction of the Distance Education Committee every three years after the course is initially approved or upon request by the appropriate Dean, Department Chair, Program Director, Office of the Provost, or Center for Teaching, Learning, and Online Education. The purpose of the review is to ensure that online courses meet the needs of changing technology and comply with current Quality Matters Standards and institutional expectations.

4.12 Academic units are encouraged to review online course content during the initial and three-year review cycle. The Distance Education Committee will facilitate the review adhering to a timetable that allows for revisions to take place.

SECTION 5: Faculty

5.1 Faculty must successfully complete the training required through the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Online Education prior to being assigned to teach or develop any distance education course. Exceptions to this requirement will be made only in cases when it is determined by the Distance Education Committee that the faculty member has prior experience teaching online and sufficient training through another institution.

5.2 The institution shall ensure that faculty members have access to adequate continuing education opportunities related to distance education. The appropriate Dean, Department Chair, Program Director or the Distance Education Committee may require

any faculty member who is currently teaching or has previously taught a distance education course to successfully complete initial or continuing training prior to being assigned to teach or develop a future distance education course.

5.3 Distance education courses may be included as part of the faculty member's regular teaching load, or may constitute an overload, or a combination of both.

5.4 The responsibilities of the faculty member shall be consistent with all adopted institutional policies and procedures. Additionally, any faculty member teaching a distance education course shall agree, in writing, to adhere to the online instructor expectations established by the institution through its Distance Education Committee.

5.5 Faculty members teaching distance education courses shall conduct the normally expected total number of office hours. In order to accommodate distance education student needs, a percentage of the normally expected office hours, based on the percentage of the faculty member's course load represented by distance education courses, shall be held online.

5.6 Distance education courses shall be under observation, or the potential thereof, at all times by appropriate academic administration. With the exception of a course review per Section III of this policy, and in the case of accreditation needs, no one external to the University shall be allowed access to distance education courses unless the faculty member agrees in advance to the visit.

SECTION 6: Students

6.1 Appropriate training, both technical and curricular, shall be made available to potential users/learners. This training shall be periodically updated to reflect changes in technology.

6.2 Student attendance, for the purpose of billing and grading, shall be defined as any activity in the course after the first 48 hours of the term, or as the submission of any course work at any time during the term.

6.3 The institution shall provide students the opportunity to evaluate distance education courses in which they are enrolled.

6.4 Only students meeting the residency requirements in accordance with the State Authorization for Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) will be eligible to enroll in online programs.

6.5 Students who register for distance education courses will pay course fees as established by the institution in addition to tuition.

6.6 Students enrolled in online-only programs will be exempt from select fees including, but not limited to, parking.

6.7 The institution will strive to ensure that the student completing the online work is the student receiving credit. This will be accomplished through secure login, proctored examinations or other accepted methods.

6.8 Distance education courses will include use of safeguards to ensure students are held to the same institutional standards of academic honesty as those in face-to-face courses.

6.9 The institution desires to resolve student grievances, complaints and concerns in an efficient, fair and amicable manner. The process for filing complaints regarding distance education courses is available as a link on the Distance Education webpage.