



CITATION REFERENCE

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Distance Education Policy

Policy Statement

In keeping with the College of Coastal Georgia's mission and strategic plan, distance education is intended to expand student access to higher education by providing an affordable and accessible quality education. This policy serves as a guide for developing and implementing distance education and to effectively and efficiently communicate quality standards for the delivery and assessment of distance education.

Reason for Policy

This policy is intended to assist School Deans, department chairs, faculty, and staff with ensuring that fully and partially online courses are of the highest quality and can be supported sufficiently with college resources and support infrastructure.

Entities Affected by This Policy

Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, Offices of eLearning and Technology Services, School Deans, department chairs, faculty, staff and students.

Who Should Read This Policy

Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, Offices of eLearning and Technology Services, School Deans, department chairs, faculty and staff should read and be familiar with this policy.

Contacts

Contact	Phone	E-Mail
Director of eLearning	(912) 279-4505	lmcneal@ccga.edu

Website Address for This Policy

<https://www.ccg.edu/AdminPolicies>

Related Documents/Resources

None

Definitions

Distance Education¹

A formal educational process 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. 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 video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance education course or program.

Instructional Delivery²

- Fully at a Distance: a course offered fully at a distance, delivering more than 95 percent of sessions via technology.
- Partially at a Distance: a course offered partially at a distance, delivering more than 50 percent of class sessions via technology.
- Hybrid: a course that delivers 50 percent or less of class sessions via technology.
- Technology Enhanced: a course that uses technology to deliver content, but no class sessions are replaced by technology.

Overview

The College of Coastal Georgia uses the underlying concepts in SACSCOC's *Principles of Accreditation* and follows these guideline statements in implementing and reporting on distance and correspondence education programs.

I. Infrastructure for Online Education

Curriculum and Instruction: Distance education courses and programs will adhere to the same academic standards, policies, and rigor as those offered on campus. The programs and courses offered via distance education will be approved through the same curriculum approval processes as campus-based courses and programs; comparable in quality and content; and assessed and evaluated on a regular basis.

¹ SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement; edited: January 2012.

² University System of Georgia Data Element Dictionary: Instructional Delivery Codes, SEC025 Description Elements, July 25, 2016.

Faculty: All distance education courses and programs will be taught by a qualified, credentialed faculty member approved and assigned by a department chair who also needs to ensure that the faculty member has the appropriate distance education training as described in Section 4 below.

Institutional Effectiveness: The College's academic review of distance education programs will be comparable to campus-based programs, including assessments of student learning outcomes and student satisfaction. The Offices of eLearning and Institutional Effectiveness will assist departments offering online courses and programs in the implementation of an evaluation process based on adopted design standards and rubrics (such as *Quality Matters*).

Library and Learning Resources: Equivalent library and learning resources will be available to students enrolled in distance education programs and courses. Elements of library support and learning resources available to students will include electronic document delivery, electronic journals, full-text databases, end-user searching, reference assistance and instruction, reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary loan services, and cooperative arrangements with other libraries for collection access. The library will regularly evaluate learning resources provided to distance education students and make recommendations.

Student Services: Students enrolled in distance education courses will have adequate access to a range of student support services comparable to those offered to traditional, on-campus users. Academic Affairs provides services that include academic advising, tutoring, registration, course withdrawal, academic calendar. Student Affairs and Enrollment Management provides services that include admissions, payment processing, financial aid information, disability and counseling services.

Facilities and Finances: Appropriate technical expertise, technological infrastructure and support will be available to meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students engaged in distance education programs and courses. Additionally, students' privacy and identity will be secured using an array of techniques, including secure login and password, proctored examinations (supervised face-to-face, electronic, and/or online services), and authentic assessments. Financial support for distance education is also part of the annual budgetary process for the College.

II. Verification of Student Identification in Distance Education

The College of Coastal Georgia must comply with the provisions of the United States Federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), Public Law 100-315 concerning the verification of student identity in distance learning.

All credit-bearing courses and programs offered through distance education must verify that the student who registers for a course or program is the same student who participates in, completes the course or program, and receives academic credit.

The following methods must be used for identification verification for the institution.

Prior to enrolling in a course, a student's identification will be verified by the institution by the following methods:

1. Upon admission to the College, all distance education students are required to present identification either in person or through a notarized copy.
2. All students are given a unique username and password. While usernames are system-generated, students are not given their initial password until their identity is verified. The username and password are required to access both the course registration system and the learning management system (LMS). Students create a new password every 120 days.
3. The College also uses multifactor authentication so that, beyond a username and password, there is a second layer of identification verification to ensure each student is the individual logging in to his or her account. This second layer requires randomly generated PIN codes that are sent either to the student's cell phone on record or to a hardware token given and registered to them through

Technology Services.

College of Coastal Georgia faculty engage in various educational practices to verify student identification – examples:

- Course syllabi include a statement about academic integrity
- Students are required to submit several drafts of a paper instead of one final paper that makes it difficult to use online paper mills
- Time objective tests.
- Multimedia projects are assigned that capture the student's voice or image
- Use authentic assessment assignments such as journals, group projects, and portfolios
- Conduct several virtual class meetings with video to review discussion postings and answer questions concerning assignments
- Randomize online exam questions

Faculty may use an additional layer of verification through one of the following means:

1. To assist faculty in verifying the identity of students taking tests online, the College provides faculty with the option of using an advanced exam proctoring application, a tool that captures an image of the student and video showing the student and the test-taking environment. The College offers an exam proctoring application that limits the student's access to any computer content other than the test-taking environment by blocking other websites and access to computer files.
2. Faculty have the option of requiring one or more proctored exams. This requirement is left to the discretion of the department.
3. Faculty have a responsibility to identify and report academic changes in students to their chair or dean. These changes could include changes in academic performance, changes in writing style, or conflicting statements made by students in discussions or email.

III. Attendance Verification for Online Courses

All online courses must include an attendance verification activity. Faculty should monitor this activity and report students who do not attend.

The purpose of the verification activity is to prevent future problems associated with tuition refunds, federal financial aid relative to Title IV refunding rules, and issuance of grades of "W" (withdraw), "WF" (withdraw failing) or "F" (failure) for students who never attended online class.

IV. Quality of Online Instruction

Faculty must complete professional development or provide sufficient evidence of online teaching expertise prior to teaching online. Additionally, courses should be reviewed prior to the first online delivery and every three years.

In order to teach an online course, a faculty member must complete one of four pathways:

1. [New Instructors] Complete the USG Online Instructor Certification Program, which concentrates on online teaching pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning principles, as well as interactive technologies, advanced course design, and accessibility. This certification is delivered through three courses: Developing an Online Course, Cultivating Online Community, and Advancing Course Quality. Each course takes approximately 10 hours to complete.
2. [Experienced Instructors] Certification may be approved where instructors have prior experience, completed QM training, or a similar online teaching certification at an accredited institution of higher education. They must supply a certification, email, badge, or other evidence that such training or certification was completed.

3. [Experienced Instructors] Certification may be approved by the faculty member's Dean, by a review of evidence of online teaching expertise. For example, the faculty member may put a course up for review by the Dean or his/her designee. The Office of eLearning will provide deans with a Quality Matters (QM) Rubric or similar rubric to aid in their review.
4. [Short Notice Assignments] In emergency situations, a faculty member can teach an online course if one of the following are true:
 - They complete the Online Quick Course Guide (10 hours), have taught online previously at an accredited institution of higher education, and can provide access for review and approval to the supervisor or an evaluator chosen by the supervisor.
 - They have taught a seated course, with extensive LMS components, at the College and agree to work with a mentor to concurrently complete pathway 1 within two semesters. The mentor will be responsible for ensuring adherence to guidelines and standards. The mentor will have access to their online courses.
 - They have completed QM training or a similar online teaching certification at an accredited institution of higher education. They must supply a certification, email, badge, or other evidence that such training or certification was completed.

V. FERPA and Distance Education

All credit-bearing courses and programs offered through distance education must assure compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). As such, College of Coastal Georgia personnel must not permit access to or release of any confidential student information to any third parties without written consent of the student other than the following (34 CFR § 99.31):

- School officials with legitimate educational interest
- Other schools to which a student is transferring
- Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes
- Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student
- Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school
- Accrediting organizations
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena
- Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies
- Appropriate external parties, such as law enforcement agencies, in order to investigate and respond to suspected violations of law or University policy. Any such disclosures shall comply with all applicable laws.

Electronic student submissions should not be accessible to anyone other than the student and the employee who needs the electronic submission to carry out his/her duties. These individuals would usually include the instructor, administrators or staff approved by the College, learning management system administrators, mentors, and course reviewers. For student work to become available to a third party, the student must give permission. This consent is voluntary, and a student may decline. If a student declines to give consent, the student cannot be denied any academic opportunity or privilege or suffer any adverse consequences as a result.

Sites Outside of the College. If students are required or requested to post to websites or social networking sites outside of the College of Coastal Georgia, FERPA protections as to third parties cannot be assured. As a result, instructors should inform students of the issues, conditions, and associated risks at the beginning of the semester using the course syllabus.

Instructors should never post student grades, ID numbers, or any other personally identifiable information on a third-party site. Students should also be warned against posting personal information about themselves or their classmates.

VI. Plagiarism Detection Software

Faculty may use or require the use of plagiarism detection software as part of their course in the learning management system. The College of Coastal Georgia currently is part of a University System of Georgia contract for the use of plagiarism detection software. This software is a third-party system and therefore faculty should include the following statement on their syllabus indicating the use of the system for plagiarism detection:

Students taking this course understand all required papers may be subject to submission for textual originality review via the plagiarism detection function in the dropbox in the learning management system. Enrolled students consent to their papers being archived as source documents in the plagiarism detection software's reference database for the purpose of evaluating originality and preserving academic integrity. All papers are encrypted and stored in such a way to protect original user content.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities each party has in connection with the Distance Education Policy are:

Party	Responsibility
Office of eLearning	Address any problems which may arise with distance education delivery and train instructors in the use of online learning software.
Technology Services	Responsible for maintaining up-to-date network security, thorough password protection protocols, and strict IT HelpDesk procedures.
School Deans and Department Chairs	Ensuring faculty teaching online are appropriately qualified and for ensuring that faculty are aware of and comply with the Distance Education Policy and its verification of student identity provision.
Faculty	Hold primary responsibility for ensuring that their courses comply with the provisions of the College's Distance Education Policy and its verification of student identity provision. Faculty are also responsible for informing the eLearning Director of any new technologies being used to verify student identity to ensure student privacy can be maintained appropriately and appropriate support resources deployed.
Students	Users are responsible for providing complete and accurate information about themselves in any identity verification process. Each student is responsible for making a reasonable effort to protect passwords and to secure resources against unauthorized use/access. Students must not use another individual's account, or attempt to capture, guess, or distribute other users' passwords or similar private information.
Office of Institutional Effectiveness	Ensure assessment and evaluation of online instruction is conducted on a regular basis as part of continuous quality improvement.
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs (PVPAA)	Responsible for ensuring College-wide compliance with the Distance Education Policy and its verification of student identity provision. The PVPAA's Office is responsible for publishing College-wide information on how identity verification processes protect student privacy, and for ensuring that College-level processes also remain in compliance with this policy.

Forms

None

Appendices

None