



DISTANCE AND CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION

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Responsible Office:	Office of Extended Learning
Responsible Executive:	Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Applies to:	University Community

Policy Statement

The Office of Extended Learning (OEL) provides support to the distance and online education program offerings at Norfolk State University. This includes providing policies, standards, guidance, and support for the instructional development and delivery of instruction using learning management systems, learning tools, video, and web conferencing systems. Each online degree program is supported through its respective academic college and/or school. The University’s academic review of distance and/or correspondence education programs is comparable to campus-based program, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction. It is up to each academic department to ensure all online faculty are certified through the University’s certification process. The Office of Extended Learning assists the academic units with maintaining and providing quality course offerings that have been benchmarked with the nationally recognized Quality Matters online course quality standards.

The offering of distance and correspondence education programs and courses will be in alignment with the University’s mission, the [21st Century Distance Education Guidelines](#), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges’ (SACSCOC), [Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement](#), and will apply to all academic programs, regardless of delivery modality. All distance and correspondence education programs and courses will adhere to the University’s published academic policies and procedures, and the SACSCOC’s [Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education \(On-Line Learning\)](#). The University will ensure all distance and correspondence education programs have appropriate support services and resources.

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Definitions

Correspondence Education: A formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced. (SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement, Revised and Edited SACSCOC Board of Trustees, September 2020).

Course Design Template: A university-approved template for all asynchronous and synchronous online, blended/hybrid, web- or technology-enhanced, and face-to-face courses with common components, criteria, and guidelines that faculty can augment with their needs and requirements.

Distance Education: 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 other digital media if used as part of the distance education course or program (SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement, Revised and Edited: SACSCOC Board of Trustees, September 2020).



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Asynchronous Online Course: Any course offered fully over the Internet and is a formal education process in which a student learns entirely through online delivery of content and instruction. Students are not required to have in-person meetings with the instructor or student peers. Norfolk State University defines and identifies asynchronous online courses as sections 90, 91, and 92.

Blended/Hybrid Course: A course that combines two modes of instruction: online and face-to-face, and is a formal education process in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path or pace. Norfolk State University defines and identifies blended/hybrid courses as sections 45, 46, and 47.

Synchronous Online Course. Any course that is offered at a scheduled, predetermined time (synchronously) with students connecting to a virtual room or location and interacting with faculty and fellow students via a web/video conferencing platform. Norfolk State University defines and identifies synchronous online courses as sections 76 and 77.

Web- or Technology-enhanced Course: A traditional course offered with some content elements delivered over the Internet and is a formal education process in which a student learns through traditional classroom delivery of content and instruction. Use of technology typically does not reduce the time traditionally spent in the face-to-face class.

Contacts

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs officially interprets this policy. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by [BOV Policy # 01 \(2014\) Creating and Maintaining Policies](#) through the appropriate governance structures.

Stakeholder(s)

Faculty, students, administrators, staff, and contracted employees serve as key stakeholders as the University is a community of varying individuals.

Policy Contents

This policy defines the framework to develop, deliver, support, and coordinate distance and/or correspondence education programs and courses at the University as well as establish procedures for maintaining compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' [Distance Education and Correspondence Courses Policy Statement](#), [Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education \(On-Line Learning\)](#), and [Guidelines for Addressing Distance Education and Correspondence Courses](#). The University will use the following guidelines in implementing and reporting on distance and correspondence education programs:

Mission

The University's mission will reflect the role of its distance education programs and/or correspondence courses.



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Curriculum and Instruction

The academic content and requirements for distance and correspondence education programs and courses will be equivalent to the academic content and requirement for campus-based programs and courses. The faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight of distance education and correspondence courses, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction and are responsible for maintaining the same high standards for all courses, regardless of delivery method; and for regularly assessing the content and methods by which the courses are delivered.

For all degree programs offered through distance education or correspondence courses, the program length will be appropriate for each of the educational programs and will embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with the institution's mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. Additionally, the University will ensure it reports accurate distance education headcount enrollment and agrees to professional licensure disclosures as required by 34 §C.F.R. 668.43.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

Good online instructors engage in regular and substantive interaction (RSI) with students to promote a strong sense of instructor presence in the online classroom. Prior to the student's completion of a course or competency, the University ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by:

- Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
- Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Regular and substantive interactions must:

- be with an instructor as defined by the University's accreditor
- be initiated by the instructor;
- be scheduled and predictable;
- be academic in nature and relevant to the course; and
- include at least two of the following:
 - direct instruction,
 - coursework assessment or feedback,
 - information about the course content,
 - group discussion of the course content, or
 - other instructional methods approved by the University's accreditor



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Attendance

Documenting that a student has logged into a distance education course is NOT sufficient, by itself, to demonstrate academic attendance by a student. The student must participate in class or was otherwise engaged in an academically related activity. Examples of acceptable evidence of academic attendance and attendance at an academically related activity in a distance education program include, but are not limited to the following:

- student submission of an academic assignment,
- student submission of an exam,
- documented student participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- a posting by the student showing the student's participation in an online study group that is assigned by the institution,
- a posting by the student in a discussion forum showing the student's participation in an online discussion about academic matters
- an email from the student or other documentation showing that the student initiated contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Faculty

As with campus-based programs and courses, faculty assigned to develop, design, and teach distance and/or correspondence education courses will be equally qualified; and the criteria for the evaluation of faculty teaching distance and/or correspondence education courses will be similar. The academic unit is responsible for ensuring faculty are qualified to teach distance and/or correspondence education courses.

Prior to being assigned to teach a distance and/or correspondence education course, the academic unit will verify the faculty member's eligibility. Faculty teaching distance and/or correspondence education courses will be required to demonstrate proficiency in computer usage; online content development, delivery and management; pedagogical uses of specific instructional technologies; online course readiness and design; strategies for developing online student engagement and faculty-to-learner, learner-to-learner, and learner-to-content interactions; and the requirements for incorporating accessibility technologies in an alternative delivery format.

Proficiency to teach distance and/or correspondence education will be demonstrated by a faculty member's successful completion of the Office of Extended Learning (OEL) Faculty Online Certification Program or a test-out option. Faculty who can document the completion of an online teaching certification program from another regionally accredited university/college or national agency/organization or have extensive online teaching experience may be certified to teach after successfully testing out of the OEL Faculty Online Certification Program.

Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate recognition of teaching, service, and scholarly or creative activities related to distance and/or correspondence education programs or courses.



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Faculty will adhere the guidelines outlined in BOV Policy #35 Intellectual Property Policy with regard to ownership of materials and utilization of revenues derived from the creation and production of intellectual property.

Institutional Effectiveness

The University's academic review of distance and/or correspondence education programs will be comparable to campus-base programs, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction. The Office of Extended Learning will assist the academic unit in the implementation of an evaluation process for exemplary course design using Quality Matters national standards, best practices, and instructional design principles.

Library and Learning Resources

Equivalent library and learning resources will be available to students enrolled in distance and/or correspondence programs and courses. As with campus-based programs and courses, the requirements of the various academic programs will determine the requisite library and learning resources. Elements of library support and learning resources will include, but not be limited to, electronic document delivery, electronic journals, full-text databases, end-user searching, reference assistance and instruction, network access, reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary loan services, cooperative arrangements with other libraries for collection access, cooperative development of databases, and other strategies that emphasize access to resources.

Student Services

Students enrolled in distance education and/or correspondence education courses will have adequate access to the range of appropriate academic and student support services. These include admission, orientation, course registration services, academic advising complaint resolution, textbook acquisition, financial aid, career development, and other special program accommodations, as applicable. Additionally, personal information will be protected. The University protects the privacy of all students, including distance education students, through the strict adherence to the rules of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99)

An array of techniques will be used to protect distance and/or correspondence education students' privacy and identity. These include secure login and password, proctored examinations (supervised face-to-face, electronic, and/or online services), and authentic assessments. For all proctored examinations, student must present an official, current University picture ID prior to taking the examination. Students are responsible for all associated costs incurred for arranging and scheduling of proctored examinations that are not administered by an official University faculty member or designee or a Testing Services representative.

Any new technique, technology, and best practice designed to protect students' privacy and verify identification must be reviewed and approved by the Office of Extended Learning prior to implementation



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Facilities and Finances

Appropriate technical expertise and technological infrastructure will be available to meet the needs of students enrolled in distance and/or correspondence education programs and courses.

Consumer Protection

The University agrees that in cases where it cannot fully deliver instruction for which a student has contracted to provide a reasonable alternative for delivering the instruction or reasonable financial compensation for the education the student did not receive. This may include tuition assurance funds, surety bonds, irrevocable letter of credit, assistance with transfer, teach-out provisions, or other practices deemed sufficient to protect consumers.

The University agrees that it has well-documented policies and practices for addressing catastrophic events. Impacted students will receive the services for which they have paid or reasonable financial compensation for those not received. This may include tuition assurance funds, surety bonds, irrevocable letter of credit, assistance with transfer, teach-out provisions or other practices deemed sufficient to protect consumers,

Education and Compliance

New (full-time and part-time/ adjunct) faculty will be required to complete the Faculty Online Certification Program prior to teaching a distance education course. All faculty teaching distance education courses will complete annual training in best practices in online learning pedagogy and the range of software products used by the University. New students will be encouraged to enroll in the 101 Online Student Orientation Course.

All distance education courses will be reviewed using the best practices and accepted national standards as outlined by Quality Matters (QM) and will be conducted periodically according to the published schedule outlined by the Office of Extended Learning. The Quality Matters standards ensures the online components of courses promote learner engagement and provide students with the tools and information needed to be successful learners. The quality assurance process addresses the following components:

1. Course Overview and Introduction
2. Learning Objectives (Competencies)
3. Assessment and Measurement
4. Instructional Materials
5. Learning Activities and Learner Interaction
6. Course Technology
7. Learner Support
8. Accessibility and Usability

Publication

This policy shall be widely published and distributed to the University community to ensure publication and distribution thereof. The responsible office will make every effort to:



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- Communicate the policy in writing, electronic or otherwise, to the university community within 14 days of approval;
- Submit the policy for including in the online [Policy Library](#) within 14 days of approval;
- Post the policy on the appropriate audiences on the policy's content, as necessary; and
- Educate and train all stakeholders and appropriate audiences on the policy's content, as necessary.

Failure to meet the publication requirements does not invalidate this policy.

Review Schedule

List the following:

- **Next Scheduled Review Date:** 11/04/2024
- **Approval by, Date:** President, January 12, 2015; 11/04/2021
- **Revision History:** April 28, 2021; 04/28/2021
- **Supersedes:** Policy No. 34-01 Distance Education (2012)

Related Documents

1. [21st Century Distance Education Guidelines](#)
2. [Acceptable Use of Technological Resources](#)
3. [BOV POLICY # 35 \(2019\) Intellectual Property Policy](#)
4. [Code of Virginia § 23.1-903 Distance Learning](#)
5. [Distance Education and Correspondence Courses Policy Statement](#)
6. [Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education \(On-Line Learning\)](#)
7. [Guidelines for Addressing Distance Education and Correspondence Courses](#)
8. [Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement](#)
9. [Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric, Third Edition](#)

Forms

There are no forms associated with this policy and procedures.