

Policies on Distance Education and Off-Campus Programs

The University of Mississippi

Preface

This is a set of policies and procedures for distance education and off-campus courses and programs offered by the University of Mississippi (the University). The evolutionary nature of distance education underscores the difficulty in establishing specific policy. Nevertheless, it is important to articulate guiding principles and those policies that are clear at this time.

Distance education is a topic that is difficult to isolate from other academic offerings and procedures, and the following policies recognize these relationships. For example, the University has established a set of off-campus courses and programs that are delivered in a traditional, though remote, manner. There is an increasing tendency to involve distance education methods in the delivery of these off-campus offerings and what have historically been called correspondence courses. In particular, many of the latter are now being converted to internet-based distance education courses. The off-campus and correspondence course offerings have been administered by the Institute for Continuing Studies. This document deals extensively with the role of this Institute in distance education activities. Additionally, this policy statement addresses the relationship between distance education activities offered by this University and those programs involving other institutions.

Important issues to be addressed include the role of faculty in the approval of distance education courses and programs, the integration of such programs with our traditional offerings, labor/management policies, and learning support services.

The following are guiding principles upon which the policies are based.

- The faculty has a collective responsibility to ensure the academic quality and integrity of courses and degree programs.
- Distance education courses and programs should be consistent with the academic mission of the University.
- All courses shall include the opportunity for adequate interactions between faculty and students and also should usually include the opportunity for interactions among students.
- Admissions criteria for degree programs should be equivalent for on- and off-campus sites.
- Educational outcomes should be equivalent for courses offered via various modes.
- Students should have adequate access to learning resources and student support services.
- The University should provide appropriate training and support services for faculty who teach distance education courses.
- All distance education offerings must adhere to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools distance learning criteria, and, where applicable, to the appropriate accreditation association guidelines for the individual disciplines.

I. Definition of Terms

(Based on the IHL Board's Distance Learning Statement)

Distance Education (DE) consists of all arrangements for providing instruction through technology-based delivery modes to persons engaged in planned learning in a place or at a time different from that of the instructor or instructors.

A course delivered off-campus in a traditional instructor-class format is considered to be a DE course only if the course also involves a significant degree of technology-based instruction. A "significant degree" is defined by the criterion that a student's success in the class requires him or her to have access to the DE technology (i.e., that the student cannot have a reasonable chance to achieve comparable learning and class success by employing non-technology based methods). By this definition, an off-campus course, in which an instructor supplements a traditional in-person delivery with on-line delivery or materials, may or may not be considered to be a DE course, depending on how significant the on-line component is to successfully learning the subject matter.

Courses that are offered on-campus and that involve a significant degree of technology-based instruction are generally not considered to be DE courses, if such courses also involve a traditional classroom component. In this case the student and instructor are not located at different sites and it is presumed that the student has full access to the pertinent campus-based technology. However, the criterion of mutual location is not absolute. An internet-based asynchronous course, delivered by a University faculty member, may be taken by students who are located either on-campus and off-campus (i.e., an internet-based "correspondence course"). The latter type of course would be considered a DE course, even for students on the Oxford campus.

Technology-based instruction: Modes of technology-based instruction include, but are not limited to, television (cable, ITFS, interactive compressed video, satellite, broadcast), videotapes, internet-based delivery, CD-ROM, other electronic media, and a combination of telephone with any of the above video modes.

Instruction refers to any course that results in academic credit, whether it is part of a degree program or certificate program. Non-credit based courses are not required to be governed by this policy statement.

Course Management Programs refer to such programs as CourseInfo, which can provide an internet interface for on-line communication between instructor and students. This type of program enables posting of announcements, e-mail contact, and chat rooms.

II. Goals of Distance Education Programs Offered at the University of Mississippi

Distance education programs are intended to provide increased access to higher education

for individuals who are not able to access traditional campus-based study. DE programs minimize or alter the barriers of time, distance, physical disability, and personal and professional responsibilities that may otherwise hinder students' access to traditional study.

In agreement with IHL Policy, it is the goal of the University that there be no difference in the academic quality and student learning standards between courses and programs delivered through DE technologies and those taught in a traditional manner. To this end, academic standards for DE courses and programs shall be comparable to those in the same course delivered on campus. The academic department of origin shall be responsible for all accreditation and faculty issues.

III. Description of Current DE Programs Offered by the University

See Appendix.

IV. Academic Issues

A variety of academic issues are raised by DE courses and off-campus courses and programs. The following are pertinent academic policies and procedures. The External Academic Affairs Committee is charged with recommending academic policies related to off-campus and DE offerings and with being part of the approval process for new off-campus and DE courses and programs.

IV.a. Course and program approval process: A purpose of the External Academic Affairs Committee is to evaluate issues that relate to the off-campus location and/or technology-based aspect of a new course or a new program during its approval process. This Committee does not have the authority to approve or to disapprove a request for new courses or programs; instead, this Committee serves as an advisory body to the Graduate Council and Undergraduate Council on matters related to distance education and off-campus issues.

Before any new course or program that involves an off-campus or DE delivery mode is offered by the University, a request for such a new course/program must originate and be approved by an academic department and dean (and the Curriculum and Policy Committee in certain schools or the college). A new course approval form must indicate the mode of delivery and the intended location for delivery of the course. In all cases where a new course or program is to be delivered via a DE mode and/or to an off-campus location, the new course/program approval form and accompanying information must then be submitted to the External Academic Affairs Committee for review. The evaluation criteria considered by this Committee include:

- an assessment of student need for the course taught in via a DE mode and/or off-campus location,

- the location where the off-campus or DE instruction is to be delivered,
- a description of the means to be used to assess the effectiveness of the course or program,
- a description of the means to ensure adequate interactions between the faculty and students,
- a description of the delivery system to be used for technology-based instruction (e.g., compressed video, internet, public broadcasting, etc.), including any arrangements the institution must make with other academic institutions to deliver the instruction, and
- a description of the arrangements made to provide learning resources and services (e.g., library and computer resources, data bases, etc.) of an appropriate breadth and quality to students enrolled in off-campus and technology-based instruction, including any arrangements the institution must make with other institutions to deliver and provide adequate learning resources/support.

For assistance in addressing the above criteria, contact the Institute for Continuing Studies, the Williams Library, and/or the External Academic Affairs Committee.

The approval process is as follows:

- a. The External Academic Affairs Committee reviews the request with regard to the above criteria and forwards the request, along with a written recommendation, to the Graduate and/or Undergraduate Council.
- b. The Graduate and/or Undergraduate Council reviews the academic content and faculty qualifications for the new courses or programs. The Council or Councils then exercise their authority to approve or disapprove the requests.
- c. If a proposed off-campus or DE course/program is approved through these channels, the Provost's Office is responsible for seeking further approval from the IHL Board, as appropriate, and for informing SACS.
- d. If a proposed off-campus or DE course/program is intended for delivery throughout the state, e.g., via the compressed video network or via EdNet, the approval process must also include the steps explained in the IHL Board's Policy on Distance Learning.

Before previously approved traditional courses may be scheduled to be offered off-campus or by a DE mode, this change in delivery location and/or mode must be approved by the academic department chair and the respective dean. Also, the Institute for Continuing Studies must submit the change to the External Academic Affairs Committee as a point of information.

IV.b. Evaluation and assessment issues: Academic programs that are delivered off-campus or via technology-based modes must be subjected to the same type of assessment procedures as other programs. In cases where there is a cohort of at least five students enrolled in a DE course, the course and instructor shall participate in the student-teacher evaluation process.

IV.c. Relationship with traditional programs and courses: In certain cases, the same degree program or course may be offered in both a traditional and off-campus or DE format. Accessibility issues (e.g., location, time, access to students with disabilities, etc.) may justify this

redundancy. However, there is also a recognized advantage to the University and to students when the traditional course of study is pursued. A predictable and stable traditional enrollment helps the University in the management of such things as its facilities, course scheduling, and faculty size. Traditional study provides a host of educational growth experiences, including greater opportunities for student-student and student-faculty interactions, that are not easily replicated in most off-campus or DE modes. These advantages of traditional study may exist even if the academic standards of individual courses are identical.

In cases where the same course is to be offered by both traditional and off-campus or DE formats during the same semester, a traditional student (i.e., a student who is enrolled for other on-campus courses) must seek approval from his or her academic dean before being allowed to register in the off-campus or DE course.

IV.d. Calendar issues, dropping and withdrawing from a course, final exam schedule, and the difference between synchronously and asynchronously taught courses: A synchronously taught DE course is defined as one in which a student, or cohort of students, enrolled in a DE course follows the academic calendar for a particular semester. In such synchronously taught courses, the academic calendar, which may be an off-campus version for courses delivered at an off-campus site, is followed with respect to starting date, drop, and withdrawal dates. The date for the final for such a course should ordinarily fall within the finals week (unless this creates a conflict with scheduling at the off-campus site) and the deadline for grade submission will be the same as that for the academic semester.

An asynchronously taught course is one in which one or more students is enrolled in a DE course with there being no relationship to the academic calendar. Correspondence courses are taught in an asynchronous manner, as are many SREC internet-based courses. At the present time, the policies governing time limits are those used for correspondence courses. A student has one calendar year to complete such a course, after which time he or she can purchase an extension of up to two 3-month periods for a fee. The maximum allowed time for an asynchronously taught course is 18 months. After this period the student must enroll again for the course and pay the full tuition. If a student fails to complete such a course, it is not reported on his or her transcript. The minimum time for completion of an asynchronous course is two months.

An asynchronous course is considered to be non-resident credit.

IV.e. Academic integrity of DE courses: Maintaining the academic integrity of DE courses is a major concern, particularly for asynchronously taught courses. For courses that involve graded tests as a major component in determining a student's grade, it is the policy of the University that over 50% of the graded test points must be taken in a proctored setting. The Institute for Continuing Studies will assist in the identification of test-taking rooms and in proctoring the exams.

The University's policies regarding academic integrity fully apply to DE courses.

IV.f. Residence credit versus transfer credit: Courses offered by the University and taken by students at off-campus sites are considered to be resident credit. University courses taken in an asynchronous manner as a correspondence or internet-based course are considered to be non-resident credit.

Courses taken by DE and offered by another institution (e.g., correspondence or internet-based courses) are considered to be transfer credit and the pertinent rules apply. An exception to this is the case in which a DE course has been approved to be offered by the Mississippi IHL to be offered in a collaborative, cooperative, or dual manner by more than one state institution. In the latter cases, the IHL Distance Learning Policy applies with regard to which institution(s) grant a degree.

IV.g. Transcripts and notation for DE courses: Transcripts for University students indicate those courses taken in an asynchronous manner (i.e., a correspondence or internet-based course). Courses taken off-campus but in a synchronous manner have no special notation on transcripts.

IV.h. Off-campus /DE courses and academic honors recognition: Courses taken at off-campus sites in a synchronous manner are counted toward academic honors. Courses taken via correspondence or asynchronously via the internet are counted towards honors.

V. Fiscal Issues

V.a. Tuition and Fees: The Institute for Continuing Studies, in collaboration with the Provost's Office and the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, recommend tuition rates, which must be approved by the IHL Board.

V.b. FTE credits: According to IHL Policy, all FTE credits for DE courses shall reside with the institution where students are enrolled and credit hours generated in DE courses/programs may be included in the institution's instruction budget base.

VI. External Factors

VI.a. Marketing and assessing course/program demand: Determining the demand for courses and programs is a duty of academic departments, schools, and the Institute of Continuing Studies. Appropriately advertising courses and programs is the duty of Continuing Studies.

VI.b. Accreditation: Reporting any changes in DE course/program offerings to SACS and the IHL Board is the duty of the Provost's Office. The academic department, dean of the school, Director of the Institute of Continuing Studies, and the Provost are jointly responsible for assuring that accreditation criteria for both regional and disciplinary agencies are met.

VI.c. State-wide DE activities: The University's DE activities must adhere to the IHL Board's Distance Learning Policy.

VI.d. Participation in the Southern Regional Electronic Campus (SREC): Internet-based courses developed by University faculty may be offered through the Southern Regional Electronic Campus. In addition to the initial review process, a faculty member must inform his or her chair that the course is being listed. The Institute of Continuing Studies manages the offering of the course and establishes the compensation for the faculty member for each enrollee.

Courses developed by faculty for electronic offering via the Institute for Continuing Studies and the SREC are considered to be the intellectual property of the creator. The University retains the right to the Fair Use of the materials (see below).

VII. Labor/Management Issues

VII.a. Faculty qualifications: A faculty member offering a course by DE must meet be qualified to do so. To offer an undergraduate course, the faculty instructor must have a masters degree in the teaching discipline. To offer a graduate course, the faculty instructor must have a doctoral degree in the teaching discipline. In exceptional cases, other relevant experiences may be substituted for the advanced degree.

Before being compensated for teaching a DE course, the instructor must have submitted an official transcript of his or her terminal degree to the Department of Human Resources. For faculty teaching graduate courses via DE, a resume demonstrating expertise in the subject matter must be submitted to and evaluated by the chair of the department in which the course is taught. The department chair is responsible for ensuring that the instructor has submitted his or her transcript and resume.

VII.b. Teaching assignments; "in-load" versus "off-load": Whether a course to be taught by a faculty instructor is "in-load" or "off-load" determines whether extra compensation can be earned. This determination is made by the department chair and academic dean. Ordinarily, DE courses offered through the Institute of Continuing Studies are considered to be "off-load" assignments for Oxford-based faculty. However, if a faculty member is hired with the understanding that he or she will teach courses, whether by DE or traditional mode, to students at off-campus sites, then teaching assignments will ordinarily be considered to be "in-load," even if the courses are administered by Continuing Studies. (There is a question as to how to consider entirely web-based "virtual" courses offered by faculty as alternate ways to deliver ordinarily assigned courses. Continuing Studies may be involved in administering these, but the students would be on-campus, most likely, and the course would ordinarily be an in-load course.)

VII.c. Faculty compensation for teaching a DE course: The Institute for Continuing Studies, with approval by the Provost, will establish compensation levels for faculty, temporary faculty, and graduate instructors involved in the delivery of DE courses. See the Appendix for the

most recently approved compensation levels.

VII.d. Faculty participating in DE courses offered by other institutions: If a faculty member offers a DE course through the SREC or in collaboration with another Mississippi institution, with the Institute for Continuing Studies being the facilitator, then the faculty member will be eligible for additional compensation according to standard policies of Continuing Studies. A faculty member may not be employed by another educational institution or agency, for the purpose of offering a credit-bearing course, during the time when the faculty member is employed by the University.

VII.e. Faculty training in the development of DE delivery technologies: When compressed video is used for the transmission of a DE course, staff at the Institute for Continuing Studies are responsible for providing technical assistance and any training in the use of the equipment.

For programming delivered via EdNet broadcasting, staff at the Telecommunications Resource Center are responsible for technical assistance.

For internet-based delivered DE courses, resources of the Academic Computing and Support Services, including the equipment in the Faculty Technology Development Center, are available to faculty to enable them to develop the educational materials.

In addition to providing the above facilities and training to assist faculty in the development of technology-based courses, funds and/or release time may be provided to a faculty member for the purpose of developing such a course. This funding might come from the Institute for Continuing Studies, the Provost's Office, a dean or chairman's office, depending on the needs or goals of the administrative unit. These arrangements are made on a case-by-case basis, and there is no obligation for an administrative unit to provide additional funding or release time for the development of materials for an off-load course. Also, a faculty member is not obligated to prepare materials for off-load teaching, except on a voluntary basis. If funds or release time is provided to a faculty member to develop technology-based course materials, it is important to prepare a written memorandum, signed by both the faculty member and the appropriate administrative unit, to clearly explain issues related to ownership and intended use of the course materials.

VII.f. Ownership of educational materials: When faculty create technology-based instructional materials, the University's Copyright Policy applies. Except in cases of specific assignments to create electronic instructional materials and cases of substantial use of University resources in the creation of such materials, a faculty instructor will own the copyright to the intellectual property. The University, however, reserves the right to claim Fair Use of such electronic instructional materials for its intended instructional purpose.

VIII. Infrastructure, Learning Resources and Support Services for Students and Faculty

The Institute for Continuing Studies is primarily responsible for maintaining and operating the two-way video distance education rooms in Yerby and at the Tupelo and DeSoto sites. As more two-way video rooms are equipped, Continuing Studies will continue to be responsible for the operation of these rooms and the scheduling of transmissions with appropriate agencies. In some cases, such as the two-way video room in Holman Hall, individual schools or departments will install these DE facilities and will assume responsibility for their maintenance. Even in these cases, Continuing Studies will coordinate the transmission and reception of the video signals. Costs for transmitting the two-way video signals will be handled by Continuing Studies, unless some other arrangement is made.

The Institute for Continuing Studies will be responsible for providing adequate, accessible, internet-connected labs for students at the Tupelo and DeSoto sites for students enrolled in off-campus courses through the Institute. Continuing Studies will work with the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson to provide computer labs and access to the J.D. Williams Library in Oxford. The Office of Information Technology will assist in providing adequate internet access support at these sites.

Academic Computing and Support Services will support CourseInfo or other course management programs, and will provide training sessions for instructional faculty located at the off-campus sites.

On-line library services are available to off-campus students. The Institute for Continuing Studies and the J. D. Williams Library will work together to provide delivery of library materials to off-campus students. Working within its fiscal restraints, the J. D. Williams Library is responsible for maintaining an adequate set of on-line reference materials for the classes delivered off-campus.

In the case of correspondence and internet-based (e.g., involving the Southern Regional Electronic Campus) courses, the faculty member is expected to provide a required reading list and students are expected to be responsible for accessing these books and library materials. Students enrolled in SREC courses have access to the SREC on-line library service (www.srec.sreb.org/student/scripts/libraryservices, offered by the University of Georgia's Galileo library system).

Appropriate student services, including academic advising, financial aid services, registration assistance, and proctoring of exams, will be coordinated by the Institute for Continuing Studies for students at off-campus centers.

APPENDIX

Description of Current DE Programs Offered by the University

At present, the University offers by compressed video and by internet-based (streaming) modes, as described below. The University has been granted an origination site for microwave-based broadcast programming as part of EdNet. The University uses videotapes and CD-ROM only as supplements to traditional courses.

The University has compressed video classrooms at Yerby, Holman, and Natural Products Center (and soon to be operative classrooms at the School of Education and the National Food Services Management Institute). The Advanced Education Center at Tupelo has four compressed video classrooms, which allow both the origination and reception of programming. The DeSoto Center in Southaven has two compressed video classrooms. University of Mississippi students in Jackson have access to a compressed video classroom at the IHL Building.

Compressed video delivery is used fairly extensively by our School of Business in delivering courses to Tupelo and DeSoto. The School of Education also offers courses via compressed video, primarily in the areas of special education and educational leadership, with reception in Tupelo, Southaven, and Jackson. Most other off-campus courses delivered at Tupelo and Southaven have CourseInfo interfaces established, though this program may or not be used by the instructor.

The non-traditional PharmD program utilizes internet-based technologies for the delivery of materials to students who are located throughout the state.

The University offers a small number of internet-based courses through the Institute for Continuing Studies. These internet-based courses are also offered through the Southern Regional Electronic Campus (SREC).

The Institute for Continuing Studies administers each of the above DE activities. Faculty who teach DE courses that are received at off campus locations and that are listed as correspondence courses are paid according to the policy described herein. An exception to this is the non-traditional PharmD program, for which the DE courses are considered on-load for the Clinical Pharmacy faculty.