

Distance Learning Policy Effective Spring 2010

Definitions

Distance learning is defined as instruction between a teacher and students when they are separated by physical distance and communication is accomplished by one or more technological media (American Association of University Professors, 2007; Oregon Network for Education, 2000).

Distance learning programs are degree, certificate, and minor programs in which course work in the program is available to students in technologically-based formats.

Distance learning courses are classes, taught for credit or otherwise, required for a program in which students are separated, in the majority or entirety of the course, by time and/or space from the instructor and/or the campus from which the course originates. Modes of instruction and communication are by technological means, now known or hereafter developed. The policies and procedures outlined here will apply regardless of the format or method of distance learning.

The role of distance learning at the State University of New York – College at Oneonta is one that is connected to the mission of the College, and involves providing access to quality educational opportunities that extend beyond traditional offerings. Distance learning (DL) courses are to be directed to special populations. The predominant use of DL courses has been for our own students in the summer to allow them to complete general education requirements or, in a few cases, courses that enroll heavily during the year. Courses offered during the year should be for cohorts of students who will find it difficult or impossible to attend on campus. (An example is graduate courses.)

Distance learning courses and programs should not reduce students' access to on-campus programs or faculty. The use of distance learning technology should be to enhance students' access to campus programs.

Institutional Governance & Policy Review

Any changes to this policy may be recommended to the administration by the College Senate. This policy, and any subsequent amendments, will be published and distributed to all concerned at the College (e.g., inclusion in the Faculty Handbook).

A comprehensive review of the distance learning policy and process should be conducted on a regular basis by the College Senate. An important component of the review process should involve policy planning, which includes anticipation of upcoming needs of students and faculty, as well as consideration of growth and development issues (e.g., how to mediate growth).

Application & Purpose

Distance learning must adhere to existing policies of the State Education Department, Board of Trustees of the State University of New York and the College at Oneonta as well as conform to any negotiated agreements. The same academic standards for quality and other requirements for traditional courses apply to distance education as well. As an instructional activity, faculty and academic departments maintain primary responsibility for determining the policies and practices of the College with respect to distance learning. It is further affirmed that faculty and academic

departments retain the primary role in the development, provision, and control of distance learning courses and programs.

Consistent with the College's Comprehensive Plan, the primary purposes of distance learning options and the development of guidelines in this document are:

1) *Academic quality* – Institutional support of distance learning options works towards the particular goal of promoting “*an environment that encourages exploration of new and existing technologies to enhance teaching, learning, and research*” (SUNY-Oneonta, 2006). This document makes clear the extension of educational quality standards to distance learning.

2) *Quality of Campus Life* – although distance learning options involve separation by time and/or space from the instructor and/or campus, such endeavors extend the resources of the College to create a supportive teaching and learning environment on the campus and off, especially in pursuit of the goal of continuing “to provide faculty, students, and staff access to contemporary technology and effective training opportunities in the applications of technology” (SUNY Oneonta, 2006). This document works to ensure that all parties involved have those resources available to them.

Though the technologies used to deliver distance education may change frequently, these applications, goals, and responsibilities remain, and this document will continue to provide general guidance on various issues involved in the offering of distance learning courses.

Accreditation and Program Approval Issues

All programs must comply with SED Guidelines pertaining to program registration. For example, any programs in which more than 50% of coursework is offered online must seek SED approval.

Directors of accredited programs are expected to ensure that quality assurance requirements of accrediting agencies' standards are met. This includes mission appropriateness, resource commitment, assessment, learning outcomes, and matters of course equivalency.

Course Design & Development

The instructional design of the course is the responsibility of the faculty member. In general, faculty should use institutionally supported technologies for developing and delivering distance learning courses. Resources are available on campus for faculty who seek guidance in developing distance learning courses. Faculty who are developing their first distance learning course must contact the Information Technology Help Desk, who will connect the instructor with the appropriate academic technology support personnel.

A distance learning course will follow existing prerequisites restrictions and procedures for pre-enrollment and enrollment. Because distance learning media vary in delivery and technical sophistication and because students must assume much greater independent responsibility, special restrictions such as technical skills, equipment, cohort requirements, and other

expectations could be required as conditions of enrollment in a course or programs. These requirements should be clearly communicated to prospective students.

Training

Any faculty member teaching a distance learning course must have completed College-approved training prior to offering the course. Consult your academic dean for further information

Course Approval & Implementation

All courses to be offered in a DL format must be submitted through the existing College course approval process.

Effective Spring 2010 – any existing course in which at least one section will be offered in a DL format requires a course change approval form to be submitted to the department chair and then to the academic dean for approval. Any new course in which at least one section will be offered in a DL format requires a New Course Proposal Form, indicating all methods of course delivery.

Academic departments will engage in due diligence to determine resource requirements of a DL course in advance of submitting course approval or course change forms. To ensure sufficient technology hardware, software, and support, the academic dean will communicate the needs of approved DL courses to the campus sources of technical support for DL. The original course approval or course change form should detail these needs.

The offering of distance learning courses will correspond with the Academic Calendar in all respects including beginning and ending dates, final examination schedule, submission deadline for final grades and other existing policies. Exceptions must be approved by the department chair and academic dean and communicated by the dean to the College Registrar (fall and spring terms) or Associate Provost for Academic Support (winter and summer terms).

When submitting schedules to the Registrar or to Summer Sessions, departments must clearly indicate which courses will be delivered in a distance learning format.

Assessment

Distance learning courses are expected to produce the same learning outcomes as comparable classroom-based courses. These learning outcomes are clearly identified in terms of knowledge, skills, or credentials in course and program materials. The means chosen for assessing student learning are appropriate to the content, learning design, technologies and characteristics of the learners.

Teaching Appointments

Teaching distance learning courses will be considered in a manner equivalent to traditional courses in the processes of reappointment, promotion, tenure, and discretionary salary decisions.

Workload & Compensation

It is required that a course be fully developed before being implemented. Based on the exceptional involvement in preparation required for distance learning course development, this may be appropriate justification for a course load reduction, per policy in the College Faculty Handbook. Therefore, faculty members teaching a distance learning course for the first time may be provided a course load reduction to properly develop the course. If a course load reduction is not available, the instructor can alternatively be financially compensated for an overload or through a technology grant or fellowship.

Office Hours/Faculty Presence

A faculty member teaching a distance learning course shall conduct the normally expected total number of office hours. Faculty presence is an integral component of quality instruction, as well as a leading indicator of student satisfaction. Faculty will make clear to students the days or times that students can expect that the instructor will be active or present in the course.

Intellectual Property & Copyright

Regarding intellectual property and copyright for distance learning course materials, the definitions, guidelines, and policies of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York shall be followed.

The College policies applicable to faculty-authored materials in traditional classroom instruction should apply equally to distance learning formats. These policies include: a) Faculty ownership of scholarly/aesthetic works, including lecture, course handouts and syllabi and b) Faculty control of methods of presentation and selection of course materials.

Faculty members are cautioned to comply with all copyright regulations in developing materials to be published in any DL format or delivery mode.

Distance learning courses will be archived in electronic format for at least one year following their completion. Faculty can request access to these archived formats (for courses for which the faculty member is the instructor of record) at anytime through the Information Technology Help Desk. SED, SUNY and College policies governing record keeping and access to the archives of courses apply to the digital archives of courses.

Faculty members should be involved in the oversight of distance education courses to the same extent as in other courses with regard to factors such as course development and approval, selection of qualified faculty to teach, pedagogical recommendation about appropriate class size, and oversight of final course offerings by the appropriate faculty, department, and dean to ensure conformity with previously established procedures and policies of course quality and relevance to programs.

Protection of Course Materials

Course materials for DL courses are subject to the State Education Department, SUNY, and College's record keeping and review policies. The College will not use instructors' DL materials for subsequent or derivative uses.

Course Completion

Existing College policies concerning deadlines for course completion, submitting grades, and incompletes shall apply to distance learning courses.

Evaluation

DL courses will be evaluated using a College-approved form that includes questions that are appropriate to the delivery modality.

Student Issues & Services

Services for students taking distance learning courses will be provided according to the policies and procedures of the offices and facilities providing those services. These services include, but are not limited to, academic advisement, bookstore, disability services, enrollment/registration, financial aid, library, technical help, and tutoring. Faculty are required to apprise students of available services. It is expected that personnel in these services will make appropriate and reasonable efforts, within the limits of available staff and resources to accommodate distance learning students as is done for on-campus students.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to comply with current College policy on Academic Integrity. Faculty are encouraged to familiarize their students with the policy and the concept of academic integrity.

Training

It is important to ensure that students understand how the course interface works so that the technology does not present students with unnecessary barriers to learning. Therefore, instructors teaching distance learning courses should provide their students with an orientation, either in person or through the distance learning format, to the particular interface being used.

Transfer Credit

For current students, credits from distance learning courses transferring into an Oneonta degree program are subject to prior-approval by the department chair or associate dean of the program and administered by the Academic Advisement Center.

Receipt of DL transfer credits from other institutions will be judged for acceptance according to existing policies pertaining to transfer courses and credits.

Institutional Support for Technology

It is important that the institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing technical support for both faculty and students. It is expected that the institution will work to maintain technical and service reliability, to keep pace with technological and pedagogical advancements, to provide timely notification of such changes, and to continue to provide various means of support as technology and learning modes change.

Technical Support

SUNY Oneonta is responsible for the technological delivery of distance learning courses. This support is considered part of the usual and customary equipment and resources available to support

all faculty teaching. This includes ensuring, as part of the course change or new course approval process, that:

Distance learning courses should not drain campus resources and not deter students from coming to campus.

Basic and necessary technology and equipment are identified and in place to develop and teach distance learning courses, from instructor's assigned workspace.

Resources for distance learning represent the current state-of-the-art technology available, contingent upon available funding.

The College provides appropriate and timely training and technical support for faculty members.

Continued technical and curricular training courses for potential users will be available as new technologies become available.

The College will provide appropriate forms of assistance and support personnel to faculty members to develop distance learning courses.

Recommended by the Policy on Distance Learning and approved by the College Senate, January 2009. Approved with revisions by the Council of Deans, June 2009. Approved by the President, October, 2009.

