Texas Wesleyan University
Policy Title: Distance Education Policy

Policy Statement

Texas Wesleyan University recognizes the goal of distance education is to increase accessibility to learning by providing a high quality education to students in a variety of formats. This policy outlines the process, procedures and expectations for developing and delivering courses by distance education.

Policy Procedures

Texas Wesleyan University is dedicated to cultivating critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and creative problem solving in its students to prepare them for careers, professional programs, and graduate schools. Texas Wesleyan University also strives to maintain undergraduate and graduate programs that are accessible to working adults. Distance education is central to both of these aspects of Texas Wesleyan's mission.

Distance education is defined as the process where on-campus and off-campus learners can access course related materials, resources, and communication via synchronous (live interactive) or asynchronous (anytime-anywhere) delivery methods. Texas Wesleyan University defines distance learners as students who receive programs and/or course content primarily or exclusively through the aforementioned delivery methods. Students enrolled in study abroad programs are excluded from this definition.

Goals for Distance Education

1. Provide a high quality education (course and/or programs) to a diverse community of learners.
2. Serve the higher education and professional needs of the community
3. Enable students to utilize current technologies for academic success and professional development.
4. Provide faculty with professional development opportunities in state-of-the-art technologies to enhance the broader goals of distance education and to model appropriately the use of technology in classrooms.

Terms and Definitions

Distance education instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. **Synchronous** instruction means the students and the instructor are interacting at the <u>same time</u>. **Asynchronous** instruction means that the students and the instructor interact, but <u>not at the same time</u>. There usually is a <u>time delay</u> in communication between the instructors and students in asynchronous instruction. Courses that do not meet face-to-face and are conducted from a distance may use the internet, videoconferencing, and/or other telecommunication technologies.

- ***Online Courses***: Courses whose primary mode of delivery is the internet, although other technologies may be used as well. The interaction between the students and the instructor is primarily asynchronous, but may also involve synchronous interactions.

- ***Videoconference Courses:*** Courses whose primary mode of delivery is videoconferencing, although other technologies may be used. The interaction between the students and the instructor is primarily synchronous..

- ***Hybrid Courses:*** courses which combine significant elements of traditional face-to-face courses with some portions of the course which are fully online. In these courses, the technology is used to replace part of the in-person instruction time.

- ***Web-Assisted Courses***: Courses which use instructional technology to enhance the learning environment through posting supplemental course materials, facilitating discussions, and/or extending office hours. In these courses, the technology supplements the course, but does not replace in-person instruction time.

- ***Learning Management System (LMS)*** - is defined as a computer software platform such as Blackboard used to deliver online, videoconference, hybrid, and Web-Assisted courses.

Principles for Distant Education Instruction (Online or Videoconference)

Student Support and Information

- Distance Education instruction courses and programs shall provide an opportunity for interaction between students and the faculty member responsible for the course, so that students can receive prompt responses to their questions.
- The Class Schedule shall clearly identify online, videoconference, hybrid, and web-assisted courses through the use of course section numbers, footnotes and symbols or other appropriate means, so that students have access to this information before enrolling in a course or program.
- Each student enrolled in a distance education course or program will be informed in the course syllabus of available instructional support, student services, library resources, and disabled student support services.
- Students enrolled in distance education courses will have access to technical assistance in using the technology employed.
- Criteria for student success in online and videoconference courses and programs shall be as rigorous and comprehensive as those used in classroom-based courses, and these criteria shall be clearly communicated to students.
- Students enrolled in online, videoconference, hybrid, and web-assisted courses are subject to the same university policies and procedures applicable to students attending traditional face-to-face courses on campus. Accommodations (such as holding a university hearing via videoconference) may be made on a case-by-case basis for students who live a significant distance from campus.

- Distance education students are expected to attend regularly, be punctual, and participate or engage fully in all courses for which they are registered.
- Instructors are to take reasonable precautions to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course is the same student who participates in and receives credit for the course or program. These methods may include, but are not limited to (1) a secure login and passcode; (2) proctored examinations; and (3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student information.
- Academic integrity is essential for distance instruction. To ensure integrity in distant education, online and videoconference students are expected to honestly identify themselves and to comply with the academic integrity policy listed in the Student Handbook.

Faculty Support Rights and Professional Responsibilities

- Faculty shall make sure that distance education courses maintain the same high standards of quality and pedagogical excellence as those taught in traditional face-to-face formats.
- Faculty shall have the same control and ownership of the substantive and intellectual content of their distance education instruction course-related materials that faculty have with respect to classes offered in the traditional classroom format.
- In distance education courses where classes are offered in classroom settings, sections of distance education courses shall meet all course objectives normally covered in the classroom-based course.
- The University will offer appropriate training and support services to faculty to prepare and support them in developing and teaching distance education courses.
- The instructor shall present the subject matter delivered as distance education in an appropriate manner, which reflects the intent and emphasis of the course and utilizes best practices.
- Consistent with the educational mission of the University, the instructor shall promote an atmosphere of helpfulness and caring as well as encourage a relationship between distance education students and the instructor.

In addition to the normal activities of instruction, distance education instructors should:
- Conduct and moderate regular discussion boards and chat sessions and utilize a rubric or criteria that shows objective grading criteria for student participation;
- Model appropriate communications with distant students, communicating regularly (e.g., email) with students in online and videoconference courses;
- Provide timely, specific, and authentic feedback to students; and
- Get to know distant students in order to recognize the students' work.

In addition to normal syllabus information, the following information should be included by distance education instructors and the university's online syllabus format must be used:
- How participation in online activities will be assessed and graded;
- Whether and how the instructor will track student online activities;
- Deadlines for posting and due dates; and
- Office/contact hours.

Guidelines for Course Curriculum Development and Instruction

Faculty Training

Faculty members are trained to use the university's LMS delivery by attending sessions offered through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Multiple introductory and advanced sessions are offered each semester. In addition, on-on-one training sessions are offered at the convenience of faculty by scheduling an appointment with a CETL staff member. Supplemental training materials are also offered through the CETL website and directly from the course delivery system provider (currently Blackboard).

Faculty are required to attend training through the CETL, before initiating their *first* distant education course.

Course Development

The Online/Hybrid Course Request Form must be completed each time a *new* online or hybrid course is to be offered that uses the online course delivery system, even if the course has been previously taught as a traditional face-to-face course. The form requires that the faculty member specify how the LMS system will be used in the course if there is any release of seat time. Faculty must also agree they have read, understand and will adhere to the University's copyright policies and all governing copyright law. Submission of the form sends the request to the appropriate dean or chair for notification and/or approval. The form must be submitted no later than 10 days prior to the official start date of the course. Courses created using the course delivery system will adhere to the University's Intellectual Property Rights Policy.

Faculty are encouraged to consult the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning while in the planning stages of course development, as well as any time during the delivery of the course when the need arises.

Courses offered with a distance learning component should take advantage of the medium while maintaining the rigor and academic standards expected of conventional course offerings. In determining whether a distance learning component is appropriate for the delivery of a particular course, consideration should be made on whether a high quality, comprehensive learning experience can be delivered relative to the discipline involved. Instructors should consider the amount of learning, mastery, or competency the learner is expected to demonstrate at the completion of the course. Instructors may choose to blend asynchronous distance learning with synchronous learning and/or on-campus activities in order to enhance the learner's educational experience.

Courses that contain a distance learning component, up to and including courses offered fully online, should require the same amount of academically engaged time for students as face-to-face courses. Equivalence between distant education courses and face-to-face courses will be established by comparing syllabi on student outcomes, course assignments, topics or content covered, exams and overall expected engagement time of students. If the same course exists face-to-face it should be used use to establish equivalence and, if not, other courses from the curriculum that are similar in content and level can be used. In any case the equivalence comparison must be documented and keep on file. Final responsibility for the academic content of courses with a distance learning component is vested in the academic department/program and School from which the course originates.

In addition, courses with a distance learning component must contain the following:

1. The course syllabi must follow the university syllabus format for distance education or online courses.
2. Course offerings must be based on student learning objectives linked to assessments.
3. Students must be given the opportunity to evaluate the course using the IDEA Course Student Evaluation the approved instruments of the University.
4. The length of the course must, in most cases, parallel that of conventional courses.
5. The instructor must ensure that the program components include and that the students are aware of how to access faculty advising, student support services (counseling, health services), recreational facilities, library resources, and have opportunities for interaction with other students. To that end, the following statement must be included in each syllabi of courses with distance learning components that replace traditional seat/meeting times:

"Students who are enrolled in online or videoconference courses offered off-campus are entitled to the campus resources made available to on-campus students. These resources include admissions, counseling and health services, library, student services, and recreational facilities. Questions regarding access to these resources should be directed to the assigned academic advisor, Chair, Director or Dean."

Course Assessment

All distance education courses will be assessed using the IDEA Course Student Evaluation so that comparisons can be made with equivalent face-to-face course in terms of results related to student outcomes, objectives achievement, student engagement, teaching excellence, course excellence and overall satisfaction. This comparative assessment must be conducted the first time the distance education courses is offered in order to assess equivalence and use the comparison data to make improvements in distant education course as well as the face-to-face course. All courses defined as distant education course should be assessed employing the comparative analysis method periodically or at least every three years.

Instructor/Course Evaluation

Distance education instructors and courses will be evaluated using the same processes and the IDEA Course Student Evaluation instrument as traditional courses. Some additional specific questions related

to distant education delivery may also be added to the evaluation as appropriate. The distant education instructors will post or have posted a link to the online IDEA Course Student Evaluation form and encourage students to give feedback through the evaluation instrument. The evaluations will include questions about teaching preparation, teaching effectiveness, student involvement, and instructor-student interactions and student perception of course outcomes met.