



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Operating Policy and Procedures

Formal Distance Education

PURPOSE

The intent of this document is to provide a framework for the development, implementation, and maintenance of formal distance learning programs offered for academic credit at Mississippi State University. These procedures in conjunction with the adopted mission and goals are intended to help all involved in distance education to be successful and to represent the university in a consistent way to its publics.

POLICY/PROCEDURE

The definition used for distance education in this document is the one adopted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools:

“For the purposes of the Commission’s accreditation review, distance education is defined as 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 employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies”*

Mission and Goals for Formal Distance Education

Annually during regular planning processes, the Division of Academic Affairs will review and revise if necessary a statement expressing the mission and goals of formal distance education at Mississippi State University. The statement will be consistent with the institutions mission and goals.

Basic Principles of Distance Education Programs

- Distance learning addresses the changing demographic and educational needs of society by providing lifelong learning that is accessible beyond the physical campus.
- The institution recognizes the upfront development costs associated with conversion or development of distance courses and programs and is committed to seeking additional external funds to accelerate the development of additional courses and programs.
- The content and delivery of distance learning courses and programs is the responsibility of the faculty.

* “Distance Education: Definition and Principles – A Policy Statement,” The Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Adopted June 1997, updated May 2000.

- Incentives are important in securing faculty involvement with the instructional technology necessary for distance education. These incentives may come in the form of additional salary or release time for the purpose of developing courses and/or the technical skills to be a successful distance instructor.
- Faculty involvement in distance learning must be clearly defined in terms of workload assignment and performance evaluation.
- Faculty interested in research concerning distance education can partner with the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education.
- Faculty must be provided technical assistance in developing and placing courses online.
- Distance courses can only be delivered by faculty who are responsible for establishing assignments and evaluating student performance.
- Distance courses must provide an interactive component for students so they may interact with the instructor and other students. This may include problem-based assignments, email, chat rooms, etc.
- Arrangements must be made to provide library access. In addition to general library resources, reserve materials also may be accessible online.
- Students must have access to the instructor and/or his/her representative so they may ask questions that arise regarding the course materials or requirements. This could be done in a variety of ways, e.g. telephone line, email, and bulletin boards.
- Ownership of intellectual property developed for distance courses will be determined by OP 76.01 Intellectual Property, Policy and Procedure Statement.
- A method of assessment to assure quality delivery must be established from the beginning.
- Distance education students must have reasonable access to the range of student services comparable to those provided for on-campus students, i.e., academic and career advising.

Institutional Accommodation

Unless otherwise provided, all IHL (Institutions of Higher Learning) Board of Trustees and Mississippi State University policies, standards, and guidelines for on- and off-campus instruction apply to distance education. All academic units of the university shall have an opportunity to participate in providing distance education programs and shall be encouraged to provide distance education wherever there is a need. The university shall assure that the institution's administrative policies and procedures allow for an effective and efficient distance education support infrastructure.

The Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education shall facilitate the development and refinement of distance education programs, courses, policies,

procedures, and serve as the central repository for distance education program information and support structure. In order to ensure the program integrity, student services and reimbursement of the general fund, all credit distance courses/programs and independent study courses will be coordinated by the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education, including sections of courses that may have a mixture of on-campus and off-campus enrollment.

All tuition and fees, associated with distance courses, will be collected by the Mississippi State University controller with the exception of independent study (correspondence) courses, which are administered by the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education. (A percentage of the tuition revenue collected by the controller will be transferred to the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education to reimburse university units that support distance education.)

Distance Education Programs

Programs offered via distance education shall be consistent with the role and mission of Mississippi State University and the offering units. There shall be no distinctions between programs offered through distance education and those offered on campus. Only approved courses and programs (see the University Committee on Courses and Curricula's *Guide and Format for Curriculum Proposals*) shall be offered via distance education.

Selection of programs to be offered via distance education is the purview of the appropriate academic unit. The academic units shall provide oversight of a program that is offered via distance education to ensure currency of the program, its courses, and resources. Each program of study shall be coherent and complete and shall result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.

As necessary and appropriate, a proposed program shall complete the approval processes of state, regional, or other agencies or associations germane to the conduct of the academic program at Mississippi State University, i.e., Association of Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) or Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Distance education programs shall meet the same requirements as resident programs holding special accreditations.

Once implemented, the offering academic units and the university commit to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to the continuation of the program for a period sufficient to enable admitted students to complete the program.

Distance Education Courses

Courses delivered via distance education shall be Mississippi State University academic department courses approved through the usual curriculum approval process as defined by the appropriate academic units (see the University Committee on Courses and Curricula's *Guide and Format for Curriculum Proposals*). There shall be no distinctions

between courses offered through distance education and those offered on campus. Courses offered via distance education shall have the same rigor and expected outcomes of resident offerings.

Distance education courses shall carry the same curriculum prerequisites for Mississippi State University admitted students. Non-Mississippi State University students shall demonstrate to the course instructor the necessary background for successful matriculation in a particular course. When a course is reconfigured for delivery via distance education methods, it shall be reviewed by the appropriate curriculum review procedures outlined by the specific department, college/school, and Academic Affairs.

Distance education course offerings shall be evaluated according to the course evaluation procedures in effect for campus-based courses. Additional items to be evaluated shall include the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery systems, academic resources, student services, and access to faculty. Records of evaluations and the analyses of the evaluations must be kept on file, as well as documentation of the proactive use of the results of the evaluations in the enhancement of course offerings.

Students in distance education courses shall take examinations under the supervision of the instructor, an approved proctor, or other techniques that assure the integrity of the process. When proctors are used, they shall be verified, and exams shall be sent directly to the proctor who will manage the examination in a secure manner, requiring students to present a picture ID.

A number of accessibility issues require accommodation in the design and implementation of distance education courses. The appropriate university offices shall be contacted for consultation regarding access issues.

Library Support

Faculty shall be encouraged to incorporate the use of library resources in their distance education courses. The university shall maintain a distance education librarian liaison to promote and coordinate library services, programs, agreements, and policies/procedures for distance education students and faculty. These services are expected to include document delivery, electronic access to reference services, reserves, interlibrary loan, and a Web page that includes ready links to services, contacts, and self-help modules. The University Libraries shall retain statistical information regarding library usage by distance education students, types of services requested and used, problems encountered, etc.

Independent Learning (Asynchronous)

Faculty may elect to offer asynchronous distance education courses through the Independent Study Program. Independent study asynchronous courses generally follow the policies/procedures as developed by the Division of Academic Affairs. Independent study asynchronous courses shall be applicable to degree programs

consistent with the same courses as conducted on the Mississippi State University campus.

Faculty and Faculty Services

All courses offered via distance education shall have a qualified faculty member approved and assigned by the appropriate department head, with approval from the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing and Academic Affairs. Education Faculty shall retain the responsibility and authority for the academic management and oversight of distance education courses and programs. Faculty assigned to distance education courses and programs shall have the same profile (expertise, experience, rank) as the faculty assigned to resident classes. The assigned faculty member shall have full control of the content of the course.

The faculty member retains the authority and the responsibility to produce any revised or supplemental materials in order to maintain or enhance the accuracy and quality of the distance education course. The University policy on Patents and Copyright applies to all distance education programs and courses.

The university's distance education infrastructure shall provide development opportunities for faculty that will increase their awareness of distance education methodologies and improve their instructional skills. Faculty shall have appropriate services and resources to assure their effectiveness as distance educators and to assure an effective and efficient teaching and learning environment.

Each faculty member assigned to a distance education course shall receive consultation, training, implementation, and evaluation support from instructional design and delivery staff to assure the effective and efficient use of the chosen delivery system. The university shall provide adequate equipment, software, and communications access to faculty to support interaction with students, cooperating institutions, and other faculty for approved programs and courses.

Expected updating of course material will be planned and methodically implemented with the appropriate academic unit. The Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education staff shall be available to provide design consultation, to aid the faculty member in the arrangement of services, to coordinate the production of course materials, and to provide support during course implementation and evaluation in order to allow the faculty member to focus as much as possible on the content and delivery of instruction and on interaction with and the assessment of the learning of the students.

Faculty shall receive appropriate recognition of teaching and scholarly activities related to distance education programs commensurate with their efforts in traditional activities and programs. Faculty may be remunerated for any additional effort in serving distance education students as appropriate for the particular practices set by the individual department, college, or school and in accordance with established university policy.

Student Services

Distance education students shall receive clear, accurate, complete, and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, required technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic resources, availability of student services, program/course costs and payment policies, dates, time frames and deadlines, academic policies and appeals processes, availability of disability accommodations, and procedures for accessing these resources.

Distance education students shall have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and student rights appropriate to support their learning and successful matriculation. These will be comparable to those offered to traditional, on-campus users. Services should include all or most of the following: admissions, cashier's office, payment processing (refunds, billing, etc.), bookstore, course catalog, academic advising, technical assistance, registration (Add/Drop), withdrawal from courses, transfers, reinstatements, financial aid information, academic calendar, student records, library services, services for disabled students (American Disabilities Act of 1990 accommodation), policies, procedures, and protocols for taking courses. The university shall provide appropriate program accommodation and support services for students with disabilities.

Instructors shall provide distance students with information about library services through a handout, by World Wide Web, or other media. Information regarding remote access to the university network should be included as well as the distance education librarian's contact information and interlibrary loan forms.

Program Information Dissemination Guidelines

Since distance education students have limited access and available time to collect information and carry out procedures related to application, admission, enrollment, and course activities, it is important to include information regarding a distance education program in an organized and complete manner. The following information shall appear on the distance education Web site and/or be accessible via links to other sites or on printed materials that the student may request:

- Name and accreditation of the institution, including a link to the institution home page.
- Title of the program, level, and academic home department and school/college, including contact information and/or a link for the department and school/college home pages.
- Program description, purpose, approach, delivery method, audience, number of students applying/accepted/graduating, orientation possibilities, and accreditations.
- Program requirements, curriculum overview, credits required, prerequisites, electives, thesis/project requirements, campus residency requirements, field/lab/clinical work, faculty committee requirements, advising process, examination procedures, special local or personal resource needs (such as computer, software, tape player, etc.), required student technical skills, time

frame limitations and expectations, and special graduation requirements.

- Admission requirements and procedures, expected student background and credentials, required test results, transcripts, letters, transfer credit policies, policies regarding enrollment prior to admission, application forms, application procedures, application deadlines, application fees, where to begin, and the contact person.
- Cost of program, tuition and fees, additional expected costs, policies regarding payment of tuition and fees, deadlines, refund policies, policies regarding in-state or out-of-state fees, application, admission, and graduation fees.
- Financial aid, availability of and procedures for accessing financial aid, criteria, the contact person, and other potential sources of financial support.
- Student advising, student preparation and personal scheduling of program work, course selection, registration, methods of communication with faculty, and administrative support offices.
- Library resources and access procedures.
- Computing services and access procedures.
- Texts/instructional materials/bookstore indicating the way in which students will receive or may obtain texts and other instructional materials.
- Changes in program, policies, and procedures for student changes in program plan and department policies regarding scheduling of courses and cancellations.
- Academic integrity policy and complaint and grievance procedures.
- Policies and procedures for serving students with disabilities.

Technology

Selection of technology for electronically-delivered distance education courses and programs shall be the responsibility of the faculty and department offering such courses and programs and shall be based primarily on pedagogical issues, student demographics, and available information technology resources. The university infrastructure for the delivery of instruction via the Internet is expected to provide accommodation of the following:

- Secure and reliable programs, systems, servers, networks, and origination equipment
- Rapid recovery systems
- Adequate storage and backup systems
- Software licenses
- Systems management and maintenance
- Internet access and service
- Technical training and assistance for faculty and students
- Enterprise systems/electronic commerce

Distance Education Financial Administration

Policies governing financial operations of the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education apply to distance education. Policy elements include the following:

- Distance education programs and courses shall be self-supporting, where feasible.
- The Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education and the offering academic department have the responsibility for assuring the financial stability of a distance education offering in accordance with university policies and procedures.
- The university shall maintain a policy of allowing adequate revenue from a distance education program to be distributed to the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education and the offering academic department in order to cover course and program development, delivery costs, and incentives for future expansion.
- Fees for distance education programs and courses are determined based upon the additive costs of delivering each individual program or course.
- Policies regarding payment of tuition and tuition refunds shall follow the campus-based policies unless alternative arrangements are approved as part of the program proposal procedure.

Evaluation and Assessment

Each distance education course shall be evaluated by students in the same manner as on-campus course offerings. Additional response items shall include the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery systems, access to academic resources, access to faculty, and access to student services.

Academic unit heads shall review evaluation results with assigned faculty, support staff, and cooperating unit heads to facilitate the continual refinement of distance education course offerings. Consistent with the policies governing on-campus course evaluations, documentation of distance education course evaluations and of the proactive use of the results shall be maintained in the departmental office. Summary reports shall be forwarded semi-annually to the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education for analysis on a university-wide basis.

Each distance education program shall be assessed in the same manner and generally at the same frequency as the specific department's assessment of programs offered on campus. Elements covered in the assessment shall include educational effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and retention. The program head shall review assessment results with assigned faculty, distance education and technical staff, and cooperating service unit heads to facilitate the continual refinement of the distance education program. Documentation of this process and of the proactive use of the results shall be maintained in the offering unit office and be available for review.

Student learning in distance education programs shall compare favorably to student learning in campus-based programs. Documentation of outcomes shall be maintained in the offering unit office and be available for review.

Reporting

Each academic year the Division of Academic Outreach & Continuing Education shall produce a report on distance education courses and programs. This will include courses offered, enrollments, and credit hours production sorted by college/school and department.

RESPONSIBILITIES

<u>Position</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Year</u>
Associate Provost For Academic Affairs	Review	2011

APPROVED:

/s/ Jerome Gilbert 10-12-07
Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Date

/s/ Peter Rabideau 10-12-07
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Date

/s/ Robert Wolverton 10-16-07
President, Robert Holland Faculty Senate Date

REVIEWED BY:

/s/ Don Zant 10-24-07
Office of Internal Audit Date

/s/ Charles Guest 10-26-07
General Counsel Date

APPROVED BY:

/s/ Robert H. Foglesong 11-05-07
President Date