University of Sharjah

Distance Education
Policy and Procedures
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**Overview**

As a comprehensive University with a wide variety of programs, large number of students, diverse population of learners and wide range of needs the value of Distance Education is increasing. Distance Education is an official education process in which the majority of the interaction between students and instructors in a course occurs virtually not in face-to-face classes by using one or more of available technologies either synchronously or asynchronously. The main aim of Distance Education is to ensure continuous learning for different circumstances and emergency cases while taking into account the varied nature of the programs based upon delivery methods and intended outcomes. This policy and procedures document is designed to cover all practices that may have applied to Distance Education.

**Definitions**

- Distance Education: Instruction between an instructor and students when they are separated by physical distance and communication is accomplished by one or more technological media. Interaction between the instructor and students is regular and substantive.
- Face-to-Face Course: utilizes online modality in less than 30% of its instruction and class activities.
- Fully Online Course (hereafter “Online”): An individual course in which all instruction and class activities are conducted online.
- Hybrid Course: An individual course that utilizes both face-to-face and online modalities. Specifically, the College defines “hybrid” as a course in which at least 30% but less than 100% of the contact hours are online.
- Instructor: the one who delivers the course.
- Instructor presence: The ability of the instructor to create a sense of community among learners. Presence includes but is not limited to providing connections between course content, activities, and assignments, facilitating in-depth thinking through online discussions, providing detailed specific feedback, reaching out to struggling students and making connections to real world applications and providing clarification.
- Learning Management System (LMS): A software application used for the development and delivery of educational courses and programs.
Scope
All approved online and hybrid courses will adhere to this policy and procedures for distance education. This policy applies to all faculty, staff and students in UOS. This policy serves as a guide for developing and implementing distance education.

Purpose
The central and ultimate goals for Distance Education policy are to:
- Provide guidance to faculty, staff and students to ensure quality distance education as per UoS mission and CAA standards.
- Maintain the highest quality of distance education in a multi campus environment.
- Guarantee appropriate delivery of all university courses during emergency situations.
- Stimulate excellence and innovation in courses and programs offered by UoS.
- Provide guidance to faculty, chairpersons, deans and administrative units to evaluate distance education appropriately.

Policy
1. UoS should provide all IT facilities, high-speed internet and a learning management system (LMS) for all Distance Education courses offered by the University.
2. UoS should provide students, faculty and staff with appropriate training to perform distance education effectively.
3. UoS should provide technical support to students and faculty to perform distance education effectively.
4. The instructor is responsible for designing, implementing and evaluating his online courses.
5. Students should attend distance education classes and attendance policy of face-to-face classes is applied.
6. The instructor is responsible for taking the attendance of students for all online classes.
7. The chairperson is responsible for coordinating and evaluating all activities related to distance education in his department.
8. The Dean is responsible for coordinating and evaluating all activities related to distance education in his College.

9. UoS should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of distance education process through LMS reports, surveys, etc. and uses the results for improvement.

10. UoS should ensure compliance of its distance education activities to CAA standards for e-learning.

**Procedures**

**Course Delivery**

UoS uses Blackboard as the learning management system (LMS). All faculty teaching distance education courses will use the Blackboard platform and UoS will provide technical support for all distance education course instructors in Blackboard.

**Modes of Delivery**

“Distance Education” refers to the following modes of delivery:

Online: 100% of course activity is done online with no required on-campus meetings. Online courses may include synchronous or asynchronous online meetings or assignments that engage the student in community-based activities.

Hybrid: courses taught partially on campus in a classroom and 30% or more (but less than 70%) of instructional contact hours online. Students must be made aware of the meeting dates, times and locations at least two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester.

The college schedule of classes indicates what courses are being offered via distance education and the delivery format (online, hybrid).

**Teaching and Learning Services**

Teaching and Learning Services works with faculty and departments on the infrastructure, design, development and delivery of distance education courses. Staff work closely with academic departments to ensure the quality of distance education.
The Academic computing unit, in coordination with the Institute of Leadership, Disability Center provides support in the area of distance education by providing the following services:

- Professional development opportunities in the areas of teaching and learning.
- Workshops, info sessions, discussions, and webinars on a variety of distance education topics.
- The production of audio, video, photographic and graphic media for instructional use.
- Facilitation of faculty training for hybrid/online course development.
- Assistance with the appropriate pedagogical use of technologies.

**Program Approval and Accreditation**
The processes for seeking approval for new online programs and program revisions are built into the course curriculum and is available in Form DE3.

**Requirements and Expectations for Distance Education Faculty and Courses**
As with face-to-face courses, UoS faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education curricula, ensuring both the rigor of courses and the quality of instruction. With noted differences between teaching distance education courses and teaching face-to-face courses using traditional methodologies, the decision to use distance learning must be made on a course-by-course basis, with consideration given to the content of the course, the needs of the learners, and the interest of the faculty member.

All distance education courses at UoS are considered comparable to face-to-face courses and must adhere to the Credit Hour Policy, the Learning Management System Policy, and Course Syllabus Policy. Furthermore, all distance education courses must go through the standard curriculum approval process as established by UoS, requiring course proposal approval from the department chair, Dean, Central Curriculum for Study Plans and Curricula, and the Chancellor. The Chancellor submits a proposal for Substantive change to the CAA (if necessary). On once approved by the CAA, UoS can implement distance learning courses.
UoS’s goal of offering high-quality distance education experiences taught by highly-trained faculty entails additional requirements and expectations. All distance education courses will meet CAA Standards for e-learning.

Furthermore, course instructors will originally develop the majority of the course content (it is acceptable to select online course materials from publisher content, or other online resources; however, these are considered supplemental to instructor-created content).

**Distance Education Course Development and Approval**

Instructors seeking to propose a new hybrid or online course, or convert a face-to-face course to hybrid or online delivery, should consult one of the College’s instructional designers (ID) to evaluate the scope of the work and develop an action plan. The instructor must submit either a new course or course change proposal through the curriculum management system (e.g., Curriculog). The respective subcommittee—New Course or Existing Course Review—will consult with a college ID to determine appropriateness of the distance learning designation. Once the course has received the necessary campus approvals, the ID then gives the instructor access to a template course shell for preparing the course materials for online delivery. The instructor works further with the ID on the action plan for developing or converting the course based on the intended delivery date.

**Qualifications**

All faculty requesting to teach a distance education (online or hybrid) course are required to show competence in online instruction by (1) participating in the UoS course development process facilitated by the Institute of Leadership in Higher Education in coordination the Academic Computing Unit or (2) providing evidence of another online course delivery training (e.g. certificate of completion) deemed equivalent to the UoS course development process as recommended by the Institute of Leadership in Higher Education and the faculty member’s department chair and as approved by the faculty member’s dean.
The Institute of Leadership in coordination with the Academic Computing Unit provides professional development regarding course design and implementation and supports the instructor in aspects of course design and delivery. This support is provided through a combination of online activities, onsite workshops, and individual consultations in a format that prepares faculty to develop distance education courses.

**Course Development and Delivery Process**

Departments or individual faculty members (with department approval) may propose new distance learning courses for development. To encourage high quality course offerings, proposals for creating new distance education courses and programs and proposals for converting existing courses to a distance format are given careful review by the Central Committee for Study Plans and Curricula and administration. Courses that align with new program development, and/or with a high-demand will be given priority.

Distance education courses should be approved two semesters prior to the semester of delivery to allow for sufficient instructor training and course development. The process for developing a Distance education course is outlined below:

- Faculty member obtains approval from department chair and dean to propose and offer the distance education course.
- Faculty member submits the Distance Education Course Proposal Form to the Department chair.
- The proposal goes to the department chair, dean, Central Committee for Study Plans and Curricula and the chancellor for review and approval.
- Students will be made aware of course delivery mode at the time of registration. Students must be made aware of office hours, times and locations of hybrid courses at least two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester.
- The course is delivered with continued support, as needed, by the Institute of Leadership in Higher Education in coordination with the Academic Computing Unit.
- At the completion of the course, the faculty member will be asked to complete a survey focusing on their experience developing and teaching the course. Distance classes must be recorded and published by faculty for evidence and quality purposes.

**Course Load, Compensation, Ownership of Materials and Copyright**

Distance education courses are typically part of the faculty member’s regular teaching load, with the same rate of compensation as face-to-face courses. Distance education courses may also be taught as an overload, at the same rate of compensation as face-to-face courses taught as an overload. Any exceptions (e.g., reassigned time for developing courses using new distance technologies) are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and as per current procedure, must be approved by the department chair, the dean, and the Chancellor.

By mutual agreement with the faculty member, UoS maintains ownership of the copyright to online course materials in distance education courses that are 50% or more online. Upon the faculty member’s separation from UoS, UoS shall retain its non-exclusive license to use, update, and market the materials. The faculty member shall retain the right to use and market the materials provided the UoS’s name or logo is not used in connection with the materials. Examples of course materials are course notes, course descriptions, outlines, syllabi, reading lists, assignments, examinations, instructor guides, content (written, visual, audio) and records of the delivery or presentation of the course in any medium.

As owner of the course materials, UoS retains rights here specified without further financial obligation to the faculty member:
- The right to use the course materials for purposes of the UoS’s internally administered programs of teaching, research, and community service.
- The right to maintain continuity beyond the original version of the course materials by creating derivative works, to the extent necessary to correct errors, keep the content current and relevant, and to maintain the usefulness and quality of the course material as a UoS instructional offering.
While the faculty member is a UoS employee, he/she will be consulted regarding the preparation of any derivative works. Once the faculty member is no longer a UoS employee, UoS may prepare derivative works without consulting the faculty member.

**Scheduling and Enrollment**

When submitting schedules for review by the Dean, departments must clearly indicate which courses will be delivered in online and hybrid modalities. Departments must also abide by the Academic Calendar.

Departments offering distance education courses must follow existing prerequisite restrictions and procedures for pre-enrollment and enrollment. Because online media vary in delivery and technical sophistication, and because students enrolled in distance education courses must often assume much greater independent responsibility, special restrictions such as technical skills, equipment, cohort requirements, and other expectations may be required as conditions of enrollment in a course or programs. These and all other course and program requirements, notably expectations for face-to-face or other onsite work (e.g., internships or other forms of applied learning), must be kept current and must be clearly communicated to students.

**Course Design Quality Review**

Based on national standards of best practice, as well as research and instructional design principles, FLC uses the Quality Matters (QM)rubric to support continuous improvements to distance education courses.

QM is designed to certify the quality and accessibility of distance education courses. The QM rubric is used as a guide throughout the course development process, addressing course quality in the following categories:

- Distance education course syllabus
- Instructional Materials
- Learning Outcomes
- Assessment and Measurement
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- Learner Activities and Learner Interaction
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility and Usability

Each course will be evaluated collaboratively by the course instructors led by the course coordinator.

**Evaluation of Faculty Teaching Distance Education Courses**

It is the responsibility of department chairs and academic deans to perform annual evaluations of their faculty whether they teach using a traditional format or a distance delivery format. Faculty are evaluated in accordance with the guidelines and procedures outlined in the Faculty Handbook.

In March 2020, UoS Deans council approved the inclusion of 5 additional questions to be added to the course experience survey for all distance education courses. These questions focus on students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the online / hybrid learning environment. These responses are used to improve course delivery.

**Student Course Evaluations**

Online and hybrid courses will be evaluated by students according to the same rules governing student evaluation of face-to-face courses, and the evaluations will be retained as specified in

**Distance Education Course E-file**

Each offering, The course coordinator is responsible for completing the course e-file which includes, course syllabus, materials and records for distance education courses—including graded student assignments and exams, and final grades, student feedback, instructor feedback, learning outcome findings, recommendations for improvement and closing the loop.
The distance education course e-file serves to evaluate student learning experience using course data as well as data from survey reports. The course coordinator should develop recommendations for course improvement (if necessary).

**Program E-file**

All programs offering distance education courses are subject to the program evaluation once an academic year. Evaluation is performed by the department chair/Program coordinator using feedback from instructors and students as well as data from LMS reports. Evaluation consists of completing distance learning course development training if faculty has not already done so and working with the *institute of Leadership* ...... to explore new instructional techniques to revise and improve distance education courses.

In addition to the requirements of the Academic Program evaluation, programs with significant online presence (*over 75%*) need to provide evidence of the following four criteria:

- Digital accessibility & student access to learning
- Frequency and effectiveness of student-student and student-instructor interaction
- Effective student assessments and instructor feedback
- Providing technological support and transparency for students

**Use of the Learning Management System**

All faculty teaching distance education courses must use the University’s LMS, and UoS will provide technical support for all distance education course instructors.

**Faculty Presence in Courses and Office Hours**

Faculty presence is an integral component of quality instruction and a leading indicator of student satisfaction. Faculty must make clear to students in distance education courses the days and times that students can expect the instructor to be active or present in the course, as well as the
method of holding those office hours. Faculty must also specify their expected response time to student queries in their syllabi.

Faculty teaching distance education courses must also publish in their syllabi the days and times of their online office hours, and meet the institution’s required number of office hours.

**Verification of Student Identity**

Ensuring that a student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in, completes and receives academic credit for a course or program is a requirement of UoS attendance policy. Faculty must follow the established procedures for verifying student identity in online and hybrid courses. Student privacy must be protected in the process, and students must receive information at registration about any additional costs associated with the verification procedures.

**Student Services**

Support for students taking distance education courses includes, but is not limited to, the following areas: academic advising, accessibility resources, career development, enrollment, registration, financial aid, E-library, technical help, and tutoring. It is expected that personnel responsible for these services will make appropriate and reasonable efforts, within the limits of available staff and resources, to accommodate distance education students as is done for students in face-to-face courses.

**E-library and E-learning Resources**

Equivalent library and learning resources will be available to students enrolled in distance education programs and courses. Elements of library support and learning resources available to students will include electronic document delivery, electronic journals, full-text databases, end-user searching, reference assistance and instruction, reciprocal borrowing and interlibrary loan services, and cooperative arrangements with other libraries for collection access. The library will
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regularly evaluate learning resources provided to distance education students and make recommendations.

**Students Services**

Students enrolled in distance education courses will have adequate access to a range of student support services comparable to those offered to traditional, on-campus users. Academic Affairs provides services that include academic advising, tutoring, registration, course withdrawal, academic calendar. Student Affairs and Enrollment Management provides services that include admissions, payment processing, financial aid information, disability and counseling services.

**Facilities**

Appropriate technical expertise, technological infrastructure and support will be available to meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students engaged in distance education programs and courses. Additionally, students’ privacy and identity will be secured using an array of techniques, including secure login and password, proctored examinations (supervised face-to-face, electronic, and/or online services), and authentic assessments.