Chapter 4 – Academic Affairs

AP 4105   Distance Learning

References:
>Title 5 Sections 53200, 55202, 55204, 55206, 55370 et seq.; Distance Education Guidelines, 2011 Omnibus Version (CCCCO), Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Education Section 602, Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008

Definition

A distance learning (DL) course is a course that has regularly scheduled replacement of seat time and is published accordingly in the Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) Schedule. Distance learning is hereby defined as instruction in which the professor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology. Distance learning courses include online courses and hybrid courses. For local purposes, the following terms are used: online, hybrid, and traditional courses. Online courses have no required on-campus meetings. Hybrid courses require at least one on- or off- campus event attendance. Traditional courses have no seat time replaced with online tasks.

Course Approval

Distance learning courses shall contain the same content, rigor, and course quality as traditional courses and must meet all state and federal requirements. Each proposed or existing course offered through distance learning shall be reviewed and approved separately by the Distance Learning Committee (DLC). Separate approval is mandatory, according to Title 5, Sections 55378 and 55206, if any portion of the instruction in a course or a course section is designed to be replaced through distance learning.

The review and approval of new and existing distance learning courses shall follow curriculum approval procedures including the completion and approval of the Distance Learning Course Amendment Form.

Review Process for Course Approval

All distance learning courses approved under this procedure will continue to be in effect unless there are changes to the traditional Course Outline of Record (COR).

Departments shall review DL courses when traditional courses are modified or submitted for four year review. A DL Course Amendment Form must be submitted when changes are made to the traditional COR in the following areas: course ID, course title, units and hours, topical outlines, and methods of delivery.

<u>Review Process for Program Approval</u>

<u>Distance Learning Faculty Certification</u>

Faculty must be certified to teach distance learning courses by satisfactorily completing the Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching (SPOT) process, as approved by Academic Senate and established by the College, prior to being scheduled to teach a distance learning course. SPOT is designed to help faculty create DL courses that demonstrate best practices and meet state and federal regulations.

<u>Regular and Effective Contact</u>

Title 5 Sections 55204 and 53200 require "regular and effective contact" between the professor and student in all distance learning courses. Interaction in the distance education classroom can be professor-student, student-student, student-content, and student-interface. Each course or portion of a course that is delivered through distance learning will include regular and effective contact between professor and students. Regular and effective contact is validated through both the choice of delivery methods and the frequency of using the delivery methods. All distance learning professors at Mt. SAC will implement a variety of frequent and timely interactions to establish communication with and among students, deliver information to students, and provide regular and effective contact.

The following best practices are suggestions for achieving these interactions:

1. Best practices for Establishing Regular and Effective, Professor Initiated Communication:

   - Specify course policy in the syllabus regarding frequency and timeliness of all contact initiated by the professor. Establish guidelines for frequency of contact that are the same as in the face-to-face course. The number of professor contact hours per week that would be available to students in the traditional course will also be available, in asynchronous and/or synchronous mode, to distance education students.
   - Declare response time for student questions and assignment feedback (e.g., 24-48 hours).
   - Explain course policy regarding student-initiated contact (where to post questions, assignments, etc.) in the syllabus.
   - Clarify important dates, such as the assignment and assessment deadlines, not only in the beginning but also throughout the course.

2. Best Practices for Ensuring Ongoing Regular and Effective Contact:

   - Assign and monitor daily or weekly assignments and projects that will promote collaboration among students.
   - Pose questions in the discussion boards which encourage critical thinking skills and promote interaction among all course participants.
   - Participate regularly in discussion activities with students and ensure that discussions remain on topic.
   - Monitor student engagement to ensure that students participate with depth.

- Include means for varied types of interaction in the course design.
- Maintain an active presence in the discussion boards, chat rooms, and other interactive forums.
- Give frequent and substantive feedback throughout the course.

3. Methods of Establishing Regular and Effective Contact:

- Course announcements (e.g., videos, weekly summary, weekly review, textbook readings)
- Personalized feedback on assignments
- Interactive discussion boards (e.g., question and answer forums)
- Videoconferencing (e.g., Skype, CCC Confer)
- Collaborative projects (e.g., group blogs, group discussions, wikis)
- Professor-created lessons and documents
- Professor-created modules or lectures (e.g., recordings, streaming videos, slides with audio narration, podcasts, webinars, screencasts)
- Emails, private messaging, and chat sessions

Accessibility

Each course that is delivered through distance learning must comply with ADA accessibility requirements. All course content delivered via distance learning must be accessible to all persons including those with disabilities. All activities and instructional media shall be accessible, including:

- Accurately captioned videos
- Transcribed audio files
- Objects (including images, tables, and charts) that have alternative text
- Readable course materials using effective font, color contrast, and spacing. Color is not the only method used to convey meaning
- Meaningful hyperlink text
- Documents that are created in such a way that screen reading software is able to "read" them (i.e. styles are used; column header rows in tables are specified)
- Accessible synchronous communication
- Prescribed accommodations that are followed for other graded course activities.

Enrollment and Attendance in Distance Learning Courses

Students will register and enroll in distance learning courses in the same manner as traditional courses, but attendance will be determined through contact with professors in the first week of the term. Professors determine the method and timing of the first contact with students to verify enrollment rosters in each course. Professors will drop students from DL courses for lack of active participation equal to 20% of the course duration. Active participation may include e-mailing the professor, writing in discussion forums, submitting assignments, taking quizzes and/or exams, or other interactive class activities. Logging into the learning management system does not constitute active participation.

Authentication of Students in Distance Learning Courses

Any activity that results in a grade in a DL course will be conducted through Mt. SAC server-authenticated methods. Accepted practices for authentication include user ID and password authentication to access the student portal or learning management system or by use of Mt. SAC e-mail address. Publisher materials may also be included as long as the publisher materials require a unique login and are accessed through Mt. SAC authenticated methods.

Scheduling of Distance Learning Courses

Distance learning courses shall be listed in the Mt. SAC Schedule of Classes in the same manner as traditional courses, with any required on-campus meetings and other required components prominently displayed to students. Once scheduled, faculty should have access to course development areas in the learning management system as soon as the next term schedule is finalized to allow for faculty preparation of the online course materials. Faculty will only be scheduled to teach a DL course after successful completion of SPOT.

Evaluation of Distance Learning Faculty

Student evaluations and classroom visitation evaluations of distance learning faculty shall be conducted per the Faculty Agreement. Prior to conducting a distance learning classroom visitation, evaluators should review that course's Distance Learning Course Amendment Form and Course Outline of Record (COR). This ensures that the faculty member is teaching to the COR and is utilizing the methods of delivery approved and listed in the Distance Learning Course Amendment Form, although not all methods need to be utilized.

Support for Distance Learning Students

To ensure support for DL students comparable to traditional students, services should be available in an on-line mode. Services include, but are not limited to, counseling, library resources and library reference services, tutoring, textbook purchase or rental, fee payment, and the College's IT help desk.

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