

A Guide to Ensure Quality Distance Learning



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Updated 2009

A Guide to Ensure Quality Distance Learning

This guide was originally written in 2004 as the conceptual framework for the development of the Academic Technology Center. It was updated in 2008 after the Faculty Senate Task Force on Distance Learning and again in 2009 to address additional needs of the campus. Its direction as ATC's strategic planning document continues to move us forward systemically, by taking into consideration the component parts of the distance learning 'system' when addressing issues of quality in online learning.

Introduction

The University of West Florida is committed to offering courses, programs, and certificates using a variety of distance learning strategies to meet the diverse needs of students that we serve. This document is designed to facilitate the design, development, implementation, and ongoing management of distance learning at the University of West Florida. The document is framed around the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Definitions and Principles for Distance Education, Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education and the Southern Regional Electronic Campus (SREC), the Sloan-C Consortium's Pillars of Effective Practice for Distance Learning. Most recently added to the conceptual framework are the Department of Defense Principles of Good Practice and the FIPSE-funded effort that produced the Maryland Quality Matters process. Each of these documents has a common goal of framing quality systemically and has similar areas of alignment. The concept of continuous quality improvement is also evident in each of the documents, with Sloan-C representing a solid framework of metrics and progress indices. What is evident by viewing distance learning quality as a set of interconnected parts all working together to achieve a common goal is the ability to look not only at the discrete parts but also the interconnectedness of the components. UWF is a member of Sloan-C as well as being a Quality Matters institution.

Both allow us to utilize the many resources and training opportunities available through membership.

Definition of Distance Learning

According to SACS, distance education is defined as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies (SACS, 2000). Sloan-C employs a different term “Asynchronous Learning Networks” or ALNs to convey the idea of anytime, anywhere learning.

Distance Learning Technologies

Several strategies for distance learning are available through the Online Campus at UWF to include: (1) videoconferencing; (2) elearning; (2) hybrid; and (3) supplemental.

Videoconferencing. Videoconferencing can take the form of synchronous instructional delivery through the Tandberg Videoconferencing classrooms located on the main campus, in Ft. Walton Beach, at the Combs Center, downtown Pensacola and linking through Scopia out to the virtual video classroom for students who access via their computer.

elearning. An elearning course that is fully online is completely delivered over the web with no in-class requirements. In this model, there is no classroom assigned although a professor may opt for students to meet for a proctored examination or course orientation, taking into account that some students are remote and unable to come to the UWF campus and accommodations may need to occur for the student.

Hybrid. Hybrid instruction is used when a combination of strategies are used in a distance environment. A room will be assigned for hybrid students, but there will be reduced seat time in the course. Components of the course may include online delivery, Elluminate, videoconferencing or some other technological media for out of class time. Students will not only need to be able to get to class for in-class meetings, but also are required to have access to the Internet at home or work for web-based class meetings. This model works especially well if trying to utilize classroom space to the fullest. Two courses could conceivably be scheduled for the same classroom at the same time during a semester – with classes alternating online and face-to-face class meetings.

Supplemental. Supplemental instruction is designed for the courses that meet face-to-face and use elearning to store class syllabi, course materials, additional out-of-class activities and homework. In this model, there is no reduction of class time but the web is used to store substantial course materials. This is a very convenient approach for storing class materials, emailing students throughout the week between class meetings, storing urls and other references, and for assigning interactive homework assignments such as participating in an online chat or threaded discussion.

The Quality Framework

The Academic Technology Center at the University of West Florida adheres to the Principles of Good Practice as defined by SACS, Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, the Southern Regional Electronic Campus (SREC), Sloan-C Pillars of Effective Practice, the Department of Defense Principles of Good Practice, Maryland's Quality Matters research. The UWF Quality Framework is designed to assist institutions in planning distance education activities and serve as a self-assessment framework for

those already involved. Based on the UWF Quality Framework, policies are framed in each of the following five areas:

1. Institutional Alignment
2. Quality Curriculum
3. Faculty Support
4. Student Support
5. Continuous Improvement

Institutional Alignment: [Cost Effectiveness and Institutional Commitment]

Distance learning programs should both support and extend existing roles of educational institutions. The statements listed below reflect the Academic Technology Center's Institutional Context and commitment to distance learning.

1. The program, course, or certificate being offered is consistent with the institution and college's role and mission.
2. All accreditation requirements for programs that evolve over time from face-to-face to completely distance-delivered will be investigated and will align. Substantive changes should be communicated with appropriate accreditation agencies.
3. Programs will be sustained long enough to meet obligations to students.
4. Technical and physical facilities to support distance programs are provided through UWF's campus infrastructure.
5. ATC is responsible for oversight on the design, development and delivery of targeted online programs.

6. Distance learning courses and programs should have a consistent and coherent technical framework for students and faculty.
7. All UWF distance learning programs will seek to adhere to the legal and regulatory requirements including services for those with disabilities and copyright law.

Measurable and Sustainable Quality Indicators

Goal	Process/Practice	Metric	Process Indices
Investment: Cost effectiveness and institutional commitment	Costs are monitored for DL fees and associated usage in each of the major areas using the fee for enhancing services to students	Annual monitoring of DL fee usage	Monitor annually to ensure that fees are conducive to other institutions in state. Monitor expenditures.
Growth	Monitor growth each semester to better understand our population of learners	Enrollments Gender/Age/Location of students Benchmark against national growth in online learning	Ongoing data collection and analysis, share with deans, chairs and others making decisions about online students.
Partnerships	Continue to seek partnerships that enhance access to education for our students. This practice will also include seeking military student partnerships	Monitor partnerships with institutions, military, industry and others.	Continue to assess partnerships, work with president and others to continue to engage.

Quality Curriculum [Learning Effectiveness]

Much of the curriculum and instruction polices would be considered well-established essentials of institutional quality found in accrediting body standards. The important issues are curriculum-driven and pedagogical and should be made by qualified

professionals that focus on learning outcomes for a diverse population of learners. The statements listed reflect the Academic Technology Center’s commitment to high quality Curriculum and Instruction.

1. Each program or course of study results in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree, course, or certificate awarded.
2. Academically qualified persons provide appropriate supervision of the program or course that is offered at a distance including specifically the course presentation, management and assessment.
3. Programs, courses, and certificates offered at a distance provide a coherent degree plan or program of study for students to access all courses necessary to complete a program in a reasonable period of time.
4. Programs, courses, and certificates offered at a distance will have appropriate interaction between instructor and student; student and student; and student and instructional materials.
5. Programs, courses and certificates offered at a distance will ensure comparable student learning outcomes to those offered on campus.
6. The integrity of student work and the credibility of degrees and credits are ensured. (PI 1.1, CS 3.4.6, CS 3.5.3, and CS 3.6.4).

Measurable and Sustainable Quality Indicators

Goal	Process/Practice	Metric	Process Indices
Students receive equivalent educational experiences at institutional norm	Learning outcomes are consistent with institutional norm Instructors are trained to design	Course analysis of learning outcomes. Faculty training required for both	Student learning is equivalent in face to face and online courses through equivalent educational

	and deliver high quality online courses	design and implementation of online courses Faculty participate in Quality Matters for internal peer reviews	experience. Course quality is high based on internal and external peer reviews aligned to Quality Matters.
<u>Academic integrity</u> is maintained at institutional norm	Academic integrity and control of educational outcomes remains the role of the instructor and offering department	Academic integrity policies are maintained A range of solutions exist for faculty and departmental choice	Reduced incidence of cheating in online courses.
<u>Course completion</u> rates are maintained at institutional norm	Data are collected in the same manner as institutional norm for fully online students.	Course completion data gathered through Institutional Research	Program retention rates will continue to improve over time.

Faculty Support

As more courses are available at a distance, faculty roles may shift somewhat as their responsibilities for instruction may broaden to developing and facilitating online courses. To ensure faculty are given the support and guidance needed for the implementation of high-quality programs, the following policies are in place for the Academic Technology Center:

1. Workload for the design/development of distance courses will be the decision of the College Dean based on the priority need of courses/programs to be delivered at a distance.
2. Compensation for design and development of distance courses will be based on those courses that are part of a degree program or certificate that are a University

Priority. Programs that fall into “University Priority” status will be determined by the Deans in collaboration with the Associate Provost through the annual strategic planning process. Recommendations are reported to the Provost for implementation of course development.

3. The Academic Technology Center adheres to the Intellectual Property agreements set forth by the University of West Florida for the ownership of course materials.
[<http://www.research.uwf.edu/techdev/intellectual-property/default.htm>]
4. The Academic Technology Center provides extensive faculty development and mentoring for the design, development and implementation of distance programs.
5. The Academic Technology Center provides ongoing support, mentoring, and consultation through the walk-in hours on eFridays, weekly meetings with instructional designers, and consultation with designers.

Measurable and Sustainable Quality Indicators

Goal	Process/Practice	Metric	Process Indices
Faculty have a high quality, consistent methodology for training on the design and development of online courses,	Faculty participate in Studio e (a pedagogy-based process) prior to teaching online. Faculty participate in ongoing professional development for new versions of software, LMS tools, strategies, etc.	Design to standard, reviewed and approved by ATC for faculty extra state compensation. Number and percentage of faculty trained on process Number of online courses developed	Track progress during implementation to make mid-course corrections.
Faculty have a high	Faculty participate	Mid course	Conduct formative

quality, consistent methodology for faculty support during the implementation of online courses.	in Studio e Onstage (prior Online Instructor course)	evaluation instrument End of course evaluation instrument	evaluation throughout the first implementation of the course, make corrections as needed.
For course maintenance, faculty participate in “Take 2” training to make course improvements	UWF participates in Quality Matters, which is used as the benchmark of course quality, using the peer review process. ATC provides training by standard to promote new ideas and course improvement strategies.	Peer review documentation	Continued emphasis on the instrument and continuous improvement of courses.
Faculty are provided with opportunities to get course development, revision and implementation assistance on a routine basis.	ATC provides eFridays, walk in service for faculty. ATC provides “Ask ATC” an online CRM-based knowledge base. Staff conduct in-department training on various needs.	Services are used by faculty.	Ongoing analysis of services offered for continuous improvement.

Student Support

Supporting students is a hallmark of the University of West Florida. Distance learning programs, courses, and certificates should reflect this same vision of individual student attention and guidance based on the needs of the student. To offer student support services for distance programs, courses and certificates requires a process to market to new audiences, register students for courses, support library services, bookstore

services, financial aid and more. The policies listed below reflect the Academic Technology Center and UWF's Online Campus commitment to student support services:

1. A commitment to continuation of a program or certificate for its publicized timeframe to enable all admitted students to complete.
2. Prospective students will receive a realistic preview of the distance learning experience through model courses available on UWF's Online Campus.
3. UWF's Online Campus informs prospective students on issues of admissions, technical requirements, instructional requirements and expectations, library resources, other student support services, program costs, expectations of learning online, and overall time for completion.
4. The UWF Online Campus provides students with adequate access to the array of student support services available as a distance student that may never visit the UWF campus.
5. Through the UWF Online Campus and Argus Portal, distance students will be involved as part of the academic community.
6. In addition to the course instructor, the UWF help desk, and resources on UWF's Online Campus, advisors will be available to support the online learning community.
7. Web-based resources will be in place to provide tutorial guidance to distance students to the technical and time-management skills required to be online learners.

Measurable and Sustainable Quality Indicators

Goal	Process/Practice	Metric	Process Indices
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Students express satisfaction with their experience in online courses in terms of student engagement and interaction.	Faculty/student interaction; student/student interaction and student/content interaction are evident	Mid-course and end-of-course formative evaluations SAI evaluations Annual survey	Student satisfaction with levels of engagement and interaction are sufficient
Students express satisfaction with student support services received as online students	Remote students are able to receive the same level of student services as face to face students	Annual Online Learning Student Support Services Survey	Students are able to <u>access</u> services in a timely manner to be able to continue their education.
Students express satisfaction with tutorials and guidance provided for new online learners.	Guidance includes: time management strategies, testing, how to use LMS tools, how to interact with the instructor and with other students, and how to be a self-directed learner.	Satisfaction survey results from Gear Up for Online Learning campaign	Students are achieving success in online courses.

Continuous Improvement

Assessing student achievement along with evaluating the quality of courses and programs is critical in determining if distance learning programs are meeting the target learning outcomes. Also important is overall student satisfaction with courses and continuing motivation to take more courses at a distance. The results of these findings can shape the design of new distance programs and can facilitate a better understanding of the online educational process. The following policies outline the commitment of the University of West Florida with regard to evaluation and assessment of online learning:

1. ATC works with faculty to evaluate program and course effectiveness, including student learning outcomes compared to student achievement, and student and

- faculty satisfaction during the semester of formative evaluation (first implementation of a fully online course developed in collaboration with ATC).
2. ATC works with colleges and departments to evaluate student retention and documentation of students not previously served.
 3. ATC works with colleges and departments to conduct ongoing self-evaluation of programs and certificates for program improvement.

Measurable and Sustainable Quality Indicators

Goal	Process/Practice	Metric	Process Indices
Online learning will provide needed access to education for students.	Monitor strategies for student access to education including military students, non-traditional students and traditional students,	Metrics on: -gender/age -location from campus -reason for taking online courses -number of students that are truly online-only students,	Access to education will be provided with a clear understanding of who our students are.
Online learning will grow at a rate similar to the national average.	Monitor national data such as the Sloan reports on DL growth	Trend analysis of student enrollments. Trend analysis of out-of-state students and fee waivers received.	Continue monitoring where students are coming from and how UWF's enrollments compare nationally.

Procedures for Distance Delivery Technologies

Fully Online Course Development

Faculty engaged in the development of fully online courses must attend Studio e and follow the processes established to ensure quality online learning. The protocol for faculty development will exist for faculty and adjuncts. The process proposed by the Faculty Senate Best Practices Task for Distance Learning includes:

Draft December 11, 2007

Academic Departments

Establish a quality implementation planning process for online learning

- Needs assessment of faculty and adjuncts within academic department on their levels of technological competence, their deep understanding of pedagogical foundations of distance learning, the ability to create and sustain engaging courses, and the ability to create and sustain high quality assessments.
- Plan for needs of academic department each year in the Annual Report and Strategic Plan in terms of faculty professional development and support needs as well as alignment of programs and courses to departmental, college, and university priorities.
- Track annually a series of variables including course enrollments, completions, faculty development completions, and others deemed necessary.

Faculty Development Process

Require a faculty development program be completed for both Adjuncts and Faculty.

- Require at a minimum that all faculty and adjuncts teaching online participate in Studio e: Onstage training prior to teaching their first online course.
- Require at a minimum that all faculty developing online courses participate in the Basics of Online Learning and Studio e: Backstage prior to implementing their online course.
- Require that faculty develop their course to at least the minimum guidelines developed by ATC
- Require that chairs participating actively in online learning programs and courses participate in the Evaluation of Online Learning Workshop as well as ongoing collaboration with other chairs and ATC for problem solving, support, and for implementation of their plans.

Training	Faculty & Adjuncts as Developers	Faculty Teaching Online	Adjuncts	Chairs, Assessment Liaisons
Basics of Online Learning*	X	X	X	X
Studio e: Backstage*	x			
Studio e: Onstage*		X	X	
Take 2	X	X	X	
Evaluation of Online Learning				X

*minimum requirements for teaching online at UWF.

Minimum Course Description

- Basics of Online Learning. This fully online course will provide an initial opportunity for all faculty and adjuncts to engage as a fully online student. It will be followed with at least one more detailed hands-on session with D2L via face to face or Elluminate.
- Studio e: Backstage Training. This face to face course is intended to provide the pedagogical foundations of online learning, student engagement, and assessment. Students review existing online courses while learning how to plan and develop a fully online course taking into account instructional alignment, learning theory, the role of the instructor (instructor presence) and the role of the student while actively engaging in a course. The person taking this course is designing and developing a fully online course for implementation within the next academic year.
- Studio e: Onstage Training. This fully online course is targeted toward faculty and adjuncts who are teaching online and need to develop a more full understanding of student services, how to manage their time in an online class, tips for interacting with students each week, and a variety of resources including library resources, the ITS Help Desk, etc. This course will use the “Certified Online Instructor” course as its foundation for update. The person taking this course will have a course completely ready to deliver.
- Take 2 Training. This new series of courses are intended to serve as an opportunity to introduce new technologies, new instructional strategies, and new software available at UWF. For example, Elluminate trainings, Garage Band, Video, Audio Narrated PowerPoints, testing software trainings, etc. Some courses will be taught online, via Elluminate or D2L while others will be taught face to

face depending upon need. The person participating in this course would already have a course developed and have implemented previously.

- Evaluation of Online Learning. This training workshop is intended for chairs and assessment liaisons (and others as necessary) interested in learning more about evaluating quality teaching in fully online learning courses.

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