

## Guidelines for Distance Education Courses and Programs

The educational mission of Texas A&M University can be achieved in part by offering programs and courses of instruction through distance education (DE). For purposes of these guidelines, DE includes programs and courses approved to be offered online (electronic to individuals) or by instruction provided through videoconference technology to students at approved off-campus instructional locations (off-campus, electronic to group). Hereafter, electronic to individuals or electronic to group instruction is considered to be distance education mode of delivery. Distance education may be synchronous or asynchronous.

Texas A&M University considers distance education to be a mode of delivery for instructional content. Therefore, all rules and regulations of Texas A&M University and the Texas A&M University System that pertain to academic programs apply equally to distance education offerings. Additionally, these guidelines extend to the requirements for admission of students, courses to be offered, the assignment of faculty to such courses, provisions for adequate facilities, access to library resources, and academic and student support services. Moreover, Texas A&M University Student Rules, which govern academic, student life, and student grievance procedures, are applicable equally to any student at Texas A&M University regardless of mode of delivery or geographic location. As such, Texas A&M University will provide distance education students with reasonable and adequate access to a range of appropriate student and academic services.

To meet the requirements of the US Department of Education, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the following guidelines are to be followed for DE courses and programs. For purposes of the guidelines provided below, “program” includes both degree programs and academic certificates that have been approved to be offered through distance education.

### Student Identity, Privacy, and Notifications of Fees

1. All students must submit graded assignments through Canvas, the Texas A&M University’s centrally-supported learning management system, which uses CAS authentication; or an approved alternative that uses CAS authentication.
2. For exams that would typically be proctored in a face-to-face environment (thus considered an in-class exam rather than a take-home exam), either a proctoring service

approved by the university must be used OR a set of written procedures outlining steps for verifying student identity must be followed. Students will NOT be charged for any additional fees associated with proctoring services as these fees are included in the normal tuition and fees charged.

3. Students must be notified when registering for a course of any additional charges that they will incur for the verification of their identity.

### **Faculty Support and Responsibility**

The responsibility for maintaining the quality and rigor of individual distance education programs resides with the faculty and administrative officers who offer and administer the program, with support provided by the Office for Academic Innovation. As such, the following guidelines are to be followed with respect to the delivery of the curriculum through DE.

1. At the discretion of the college dean, faculty who teach in a distance education program or online course may do so either as a part of their regular departmental assignment or as an overload. If the course is taught as an overload, university processes for requesting in-excess appointments shall be followed. The department is responsible for providing the budget support required.

2. Faculty who teach off-campus face-to-face courses for resident credit are entitled to receive reimbursement for travel and per diem expenses.

3. Faculty will be responsible for determining the mode of delivery (i.e., synchronous or asynchronous) that is appropriate for each course and program. Faculty will also be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the mode of delivery and may consult with the Office for Academic Innovation for assistance as appropriate.

4. Like other contributions to teaching and scholarship, contributions to distance education, as part of assigned responsibilities, will be evaluated annually and will be a factor in promotion and tenure decisions and merit increase decisions. A distance education course should be counted in the workload report in the same manner the course would be counted if taught by conventional methods.

5. Preparation to teach a course by distance for the first time, or adapting a course for delivery by distance for the first time, should be credited for workload report purposes just as preparation to teach any other new course would be credited. Additional support is provided at the discretion of the department or college.

### **Export Controls**

1. Per University Rule 15.02.99.M1, *Export Controls*, all distance education programs must conform to export control laws and regulations. Export control information is accessible on

the Division of Research's web page located at <https://vpr.tamu.edu/initiate-research/export-controls>. Questions should be directed to the university's Export Control Office (telephone 979.862.6419 or by email to [exportcontrols@tamu.edu](mailto:exportcontrols@tamu.edu)).

2. It is the responsibility of the department offering the course and the faculty instructor of record to ensure export control requirements are reviewed and any concerns addressed with the Export Control Office prior to allowing students to register for the section. Faculty members should ensure that course content does not contain controlled information which is prohibited or restricted for distribution to certain countries.

3. International students and U.S. citizens/lawful permanent residents seeking admission into a degree program offered via distance education, or any admitted student seeking to register for courses from outside the United States or through one of the University's approved off-campus educational sites, are subject to Restricted Party Screening by the Export Control Office as identified by the Registrar's Office prior to the first day of classes and by the 20th day of classes for students registering late for classes. Results of the Export Control Office review are communicated to the Registrar's Office before a student is permitted to take a course.

4. At the beginning of each academic term (i.e., semester) faculty communicate with those enrolled in distance education to verify location and authenticate UIN for each student.

### **Course Approval**

Per University Rule 11.03.99.M1, *Definition of a Credit Hour*, non-traditional courses (such as those taught online), must be reviewed and approved through the institution's curricular approval process to ensure that the course has learning outcomes and credit hour requirements equivalent to traditionally taught courses.

### **Catalog Program Description**

All approved distance education programs must be described as such in the university catalog (either the *Undergraduate Catalog* or the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* depending on the level of the program). Specifically, the program description for an approved academic program offered through distance education must include a clear statement regarding the mode of delivery and/or geographic location for any program offered at locations other than the College Station campus or one of the two branch campuses (Texas A&M University at Galveston or Texas A&M University at Qatar). For mode of delivery, the description should clearly indicate if the program is delivered asynchronously or synchronously (or both). In addition, the program description should indicate whether or not the program can be completed in its entirety via distance technology (i.e., online or through videoconference technology) or if there are any on-campus requirements.

## **Assessment**

Programs delivered through DE (both degree programs and academic certificates) are to be assessed on an annual basis with respect to attainment of identified student learning outcomes and program outcomes based on the following:

1. The program description of the academic program is to state that the program is a DE program, and clearly articulate the mode of delivery and/or location(s) at which the program is offered.
2. DE programs are to engage in a systematic review of effectiveness of the programs given their unique mode of delivery. Distance education programs will be expected to identify sources of data and metrics to use to assess the effectiveness of the program given its mode of delivery per SACSCOC guidelines and to provide an annual report of findings and identified opportunities for improvement where indicated.

Additional guidance and resources to be provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Evaluation.