Distance Education Standards and Guidelines

This document establishes minimum standards for distance learning courses based on input from distance learning faculty, guidelines from accrediting agencies (SACS), Quality Matters (QM), and distance learning best practices. These standards apply to all distance learning formats, and to the distance learning component of hybrid courses. Individual colleges, departments, and instructors are encouraged to adopt additional standards based on appropriate application needs.

For the Expanded and Full-Detailed Version of these Recommendations, go to...
http://dl.columbusstate.edu/standards.php

Distance Education vs. Correspondence Courses
Distance Learning Courses MUST meet the U.S. Dept. of Education definition for Distance Learning:

**Distance education** means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include:

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conferencing; or
4. Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD–ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD–ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition.

**Correspondence education** is a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paces.
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A. Learner Support & Resources
Students have convenient access to CSU distance learning (DL) resources. The following information should be included in this web site:

- CougarVIEW - Course Management System;
- CougarVIEW Starter Guide - online student manual;
- SmarterMeasure Readiness Assessment indicator – Is DL Right for You?;
- Online Degrees, Programs, and Course listings;
- DL Student FAQs;

Distance learning instructors will make this information available to students before enrolling in a course. This allows students to determine if the distance learning format is right for them and provides help for success.

B. Innovative Teaching with Technology
All distance learning instructors will use the D2L course management system. Course content may be maintained on a separate web site, but D2L must be used as the portal for the course. D2L is supported by CSU and USG and is used by instructors college-wide. This ensures student familiarity, thereby minimizing the need for students to learn different online systems for each course. It also places course content and student information on a secure internal server. Course Portal: CougarVIEW

C. Interactivity:
Interaction between students and between students and the instructor is essential for quality education. Distance learning courses must be designed to ensure the level of interaction is regular, substantive and instructor-generated. Distance learning and interactive technologies make it possible to greatly exceed the amount of interaction in a traditional classroom course. Time constraints of students should be considered when designing the interactive and communication requirements of a course. Grades for interaction should be appropriate and clearly communicated to students. Instructors are encouraged to use grading rubrics to help students communicate effectively and allow for consistent grading.

D. Quality of the Distance Learning Course
Content and effectiveness measures for each course will be evaluated at the department level. Distance learning faculty will be evaluated using the procedures established by each college, the standards in this document, and additional procedures or standards that may be developed by the department/college. A Department Chair, or other faculty member appointed by the Department Chair to assist with faculty evaluations, may review an instructor’s courses in CougarVIEW (or other platform if D2L is used only as a portal). This is equivalent to conducting a classroom observation in a traditional classroom course. New distance learning courses and distance learning courses taught by instructors for the first time should be carefully reviewed to ensure that they meet the standards established by the department and this document.

Students must be required to master the same course objectives, at the same level, as students in the on-campus course. While the teaching/learning activities need not be the same, effective and appropriate resources must be used. These resources must provide students with the same expertise and support they would receive from an on-campus class experience. At a minimum, distance learning students must complete an equivalent amount of quizzes, papers, exams, and other learning activities as on-campus students in a similar course.

E. Course and Program Integrity
Instructors should be aware of the possibility of students getting help from others on work completed outside of monitored exams. While some online quizzes may be used as learning tools and papers/projects may be prepared outside of a monitored environment, if a substantial proportion of the course grade is to be earned on activities such as exams, these exams should be administered by authorized proctors or proctoring agencies approved by the college. Instructors must incorporate a variety of tools to ensure that students are doing their own work.

Currently being utilized: Course LMS log-in and password (user-protected) portals operated by the university. Online proctoring of exams is provided by such companies as ProctorU.

F. Training and Professional Development:
In order to effectively prepare and support faculty members for engaging in online instruction and to assist them with identifying and incorporating research-based design and delivery strategies and technologies in their distance learning courses, it is expected that faculty members will develop and maintain an ongoing dialog with DLDD. Prior to designing or teaching any distance learning courses, faculty members should contact DLDD and complete the Faculty Needs Assessment for Online Course Design and Delivery. Completing the Needs Assessment can identify areas for professional development with respect to online course design, pedagogical strategies, assessment strategies, learning management system competencies, supplementary eLearning application skills, and strategies for meeting Quality Matters Rubric Standards.

All new CSU distance learning faculty members and faculty members teaching online for the first time are expected to complete the D2L Faculty Training course. To supplement their technical training, faculty should become familiar with the distance learning resources located on the DLDD website. This site offers links to learning theory and instructional design resources; course development and improvement resources; online teaching, assessment and evaluation resources; accessibility resources; technology-related guides and tutorials; and links to distance learning journals, webinars, and conferences.

Additionally, distance learning faculty members should take advantage of distance learning grant opportunities and periodically attend internal and external workshops, additional QM and special topics training opportunities, Brown Bag sessions, peer presentations and discussion groups offered by their respective Colleges, Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning offerings, USG-system webinars and conferences, and other development opportunities. Finally, faculty should regularly support CSU’s Distance Learning Conference as both a participant and presenter.

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