

Policies and Procedures for Planning & Conducting Distance Learning

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1. General Information and Purpose

Farmingdale State College (FSC) recognizes the significance of organizing the distance learning initiatives of the institution so that a well-coordinated program will be delivered. Coordination of distance learning initiatives is required to ensure a high level of quality, provide resources and assistance for faculty, provide support services for distance learning students, maximize the use of college resources with a minimum of duplication, and ensure consistent and fair policies and procedures related to faculty and students. Organized and well-coordinated programs facilitate marketing and promotional strategies and strengthen the college's image as an innovative and technologically sound institution.

Rapid advancements in technology will continue to create new methods for providing and delivering distance learning. FSC is committed to ensuring that distance learning programs and courses will be as academically rigorous as their face-to-face counterparts and will result in appropriate and deep learning. The college also recognizes that emerging methods for delivering educational content bring new and different teaching and learning challenges. Therefore, policies and procedures that impact distance learning will continuously change and these guidelines will continue to be reviewed and revised to reflect current best practices. Additionally, as changes occur (whether internally developed or required by the New York State Department of Education or the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools), this document will be revised to incorporate those changes.

The following distance learning policies and procedures are intended to assist with planning, coordination, and technological support for participating administrators, faculty members and staff. These policies and procedures are built on FSC's current academic policy manuals and shall apply to new distance learning activities as well as to existing courses and programs in which the method of delivery has changed significantly from that approved in the original curriculum proposal.

2. Definitions

Distance learning - For the purposes of this document, distance learning will be defined as instruction delivered through electronic means such as television, interactive video conferencing, or computers. The following terms have been utilized throughout the document or are key concepts in distance learning.

- 2.1** Distance Learning Course – an individual course in which the majority of instruction occurs when the student and the instructor are not in the same physical setting. The course is considered distance learning if students receive a significant portion of their instruction at a distance.
- 2.2** Distance Learning Program – an approved collection of courses or course of study where a student can earn 50% or more credits necessary to qualify for a degree through distance learning.
- 2.3** Attendance in an online course is defined by the Department of Education as an academically related activity as “physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students; submitting an academic assignment; taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction; attending a study group that is assigned by the school; participating in an online discussion about academic matters; and initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course” (Federal Student Aid 2013, 5-59).

- 2.4** Web-enhanced Course – an individual course in which face-to-face instruction is supplemented with materials delivered via distance learning, but maintains 100% seat time/Carnegie units in face-to-face delivery.
- 2.5** Hybrid Course – any course that meets both online and in a traditional classroom setting.
- 2.6** Online Course – an individual course in which the majority of instruction is delivered via the online environment.
- 2.7** Asynchronous Distance Learning – occurs when the instructor and the pupils interact in different places and during different times. Student enrolled in an asynchronous course are able to go online at any time of the day or night, seven days per week, and work toward the completion of course requirements.
- 2.8** Synchronous Distance Learning – occurs when the instructor and his/her pupils interact in different places but during the same time. Students enrolled in synchronous courses are generally required to log on to their computer during a set time at least once a week.
- 2.9** Push Technology – refers to software systems that provide periodic distribution of information to clients or learners based on their profiles in the student information system or self-identified interests.
- 2.10** Multimodal Delivery of Instruction and Services – are varied modes of presentation to and interaction with and among learners including face-to-face, video conferencing, audio conferencing, and online delivery. Varied modes of delivery are necessary in order to provide flexibility to learners and respond to their needs and interests.
- 2.11** Learning Management System (LMS) – a software application designed to support the delivery of online instruction. The LMS can create and manage records, organize and deliver content to learners, and facilitate communication among learners and with the instructor. Additionally, a Learning Management System may also be used as a course management tool to support classroom-based teaching.
- 2.12** Virtual Learning Communities – made up of learners interacting with each other utilizing online technologies. While separated by distance, learners create social communities as a part of a learning process, which is interactive, supportive and collaborative.

3. Planning for Distance Learning

The planning for a distance learning program should be part of the strategic planning process of the institution and should be aligned with the mission of the college. This planning should show evidence that a needs analysis study has been conducted, and should include information about areas of growth in terms of course offerings and plans for full degree program offerings. There should also be plans for the allocation of resources for instructional staffing and support. The commitment to this initiative requires

an Office of Distance Learning with the responsibility of assuring the quality of the distance course being offered. The support for, design of, and evaluation of the distance learning program should be commensurate with the support, design and evaluation of the campus' traditional courses and programs.

4. Academic Requirements and Quality Standards

The following standards represent important guiding principles for developing, conducting and evaluating distance education instruction activities at Farmingdale State College (FSC).

- 4.1** The distance learning activity is consistent with the mission of the college.
- 4.2** For programs offered completely in a distance learning format, the distance learning activity complies with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's "Distance Educational Programs: Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Learning Programs," with the New York State Education Department's "Principles of Good Practice for Distance Learning," and with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 4.3** Distance learning courses will be identified as such in the campus' course listings.
- 4.4** The quality of distance learning activity shall be at the same level of quality as the campus' traditional classes.
- 4.5** Admissions requirements, academic standards and other administrative requirements are the same for distance learning students as for on campus students.
- 4.6** The college ensures that an evaluation process is used to improve the teaching and learning processes.
- 4.7** Program evaluation is commensurate with that for traditional classes.
- 4.8** In accordance with the SUNY Policy, the semester credit hour has been defined as one 50-minute session of instruction per week including two hours of out-of-class preparation by the student for a semester of not less than fifteen weeks. This basic measure may be adjusted to reflect modified academic calendars and formats of study. On-line and hybrid courses and other formats of learning should contain the same amount of academic activity as provided in a traditional setting and in accordance with the credits assigned.
For every hour of credit, students must engage in 37.5 hours of academic activity. Online and hybrid courses should be assigned credit hours based on a similar understanding, even though the activities for electronic instructional time will be different from traditional face-to-face instruction. The course content provided by the instructor in an online or hybrid course would therefore be equivalent to the course content that would be provided by the instructor in a face-to-face course with the same number of credit hours.
In accordance with SUNY policy, traditional lecture courses include two hours of student learning outside of instructional time for each semester credit hour. The number of hours spent outside of instructional time can be difficult to determine based on learning styles, abilities, rates of content retention, subject matter of course, and so forth. A general guideline is that students should expect to spend twice the amount of instructional time in

activities and assignments, which is the same as would be expected in a face-to-face course of the same subject).

- 4.9** The department is responsible for the format (hybrid or online) for delivery of their courses. The decision whether or not to teach a scheduled distance course section is up to the individual faculty members unless it was a part of the conditions under which they were hired.
- 4.10** The Department, Dean and Provost will determine the appropriate enrollment that can be supported in the program and in individual courses based upon the content and learning activities.
- 4.11** It is not recommended that faculty teach more than one distance learning class during intersession. During summer sessions, the number and combination of distance learning classes should be at the discretion of the department chair and with the approval of the Dean.
- 4.12** In order to balance the teaching demands of face-to-face and distance learning classes, it is not recommended that faculty teach a full load of fully online distance learning classes during the academic year. The balance between distance learning classes (fully online and hybrid) and face-to-face classes should be at the discretion of the department and with the approval of the Dean.
- 4.13** Faculty on reduced load need their Dean's approval to teach online.
- 4.14** Faculty teaching distance courses will be provided with adequate training and technical support in the development of distance courses, and all first-time distance learning instructors will receive mentoring throughout the development process.
- 4.15** All distance education courses in development are required to follow the time schedule for course development as outlined by the Office of Distance Education.
- 4.16** The Office of Distance Learning will provide training and support for the faculty.
- 4.17** All faculty members new to teaching in the distance learning environment should have a peer observation in the first semester that the course is taught.
- 4.18** To support the faculty teaching in the distance learning environment and protect the integrity of distance learning offerings, access to distance learning courses is granted to the Office of Distance Learning staff (administrators, technical assistants, IDs). In addition, the instructor's immediate supervisor, Academic Dean, Provost or their designee may make a formal request for access to a specific class. Access will be granted for one 36-hour period and the instructor will be notified in writing or e-mail before access has been granted.
- 4.19** The faculty member will be responsible for delivery of the instruction and evaluation of student progress.
- 4.20** If for any reason, a faculty member cannot complete an online/hybrid course, the department chair may assign a replacement faculty member to teach the course. The

replacement faculty member will be granted full access to the course content developed by the original faculty member for the duration of the semester. This will allow students enrolled in the course to persist to the completion of that course.

- 4.21** Distance course design encourages student to student and student to faculty interaction.
- 4.22** Meaningful and timely feedback is provided by the faculty member teaching the course.

5. Administrative Approval and Coordination of Distance Learning Courses and Programs

- 5.1** Distance learning instruction will be offered with the consensus of the Office of Distance Learning, the responsible academic department chair and academic deans.
- 5.2** The institution shall provide the means for assessing the quality of the distance learning offerings comparable to traditional instructional approaches.
- 5.3** Faculty observations will follow the observation guidelines outlined in the FSC Best Practices document.
- 5.4** Distance learning instruction shall be offered through the academic department that also administers the corresponding on-campus instruction.
- 5.5** Before any currently approved face-to-face course can migrate to a distance learning environment, the following procedures listed below must be completed.

Faculty Training

- The course shall be redesigned for online delivery by the faculty member in consultation with the Office of Distance Learning.
- The course design shall be reviewed by the Office of Distance Learning for best practices in distance learning, and by the Chair of the Department to ensure course objectives and assessments can be met in the new format. Should there be questions between the instructional designer and the faculty member about whether the course can be effectively delivered in the distance learning environment they can be resolved in consultation with the Chair or Dean.
- Information must be provided to students, at the time of course registration, as to the percentage of the course that will be taught at a distance, and the technology requirements for participation and assessment.

Faculty Policies

- To offer an online course, departments must submit to the Office of Distance Learning a Course Development Form signed by the Chairperson and Dean in Axiom. A course syllabus is submitted at this time as well.
- During the semester, prior to teaching an online course for the first time at Farmingdale, faculty must participate in training offered by the Office of Distance Learning, which will assist faculty in the creation of their online courses and will help them understand the pedagogy of online education. If a faculty member has previous experience with online course development and delivery, they may schedule a meeting with the Instructional Designer to determine if their qualifications are sufficient to forgo training. Faculty will still be required to review the completed online course with the campus Instructional Designer.
- Thus, faculty training for teaching online courses must take place the semester before the class is offered. During this training, faculty will develop the entire course to be offered before the course goes live.
- If a distance-learning program is new to the college, proposals are prepared according to current practices for all program proposals. The Office of Distance Learning will review program proposals to ensure that current resources can support the delivery of the program.
- Faculty members are expected, as a normal condition of employment at Farmingdale State College (FSC), to develop and keep current the courses they are assigned to teach. FSC retains full rights to common elements of course syllabi including learning objectives, course descriptions, course requirements and course schedules that are submitted, reviewed and approved as specified by the appropriate academic department. Faculty own the copyright to all other course materials under the academic work-for-hire exception embedded in SUNY's copyright policy. Alternatively, SUNY and faculty may enter into work-for-hire written agreement relating to materials produced for online use in which the parties may agree to vest copyright in either SUNY or the faculty and to provide for related licenses.
- Departments or faculty who wish to use other faculty course materials must seek written approval, which can be in the form of email, from the faculty member who owns the course material. The written approval must be given to the Office of Distance Learning.
- A decision to terminate a distance learning course or program is accomplished by means of the same procedures as on-campus programs.

6. Student Support

The mandate of learner services in a college environment is to respond to students' individual needs and support their personal goals and success in their program of studies. While these goals are the same for all learners regardless of instructional modality, Farmingdale State College (FSC) recognizes the need to provide equitable services for online learners in light of the unique challenges they experience.

In an online environment, effective instructional and service delivery requires a collaborative cross-functional approach coordinated with the academic division.

- 6.1** Department Chairs/Program Coordinators/Directors will be responsible for ensuring that all distance learning program materials clearly and accurately represent the program, including detailed program completion requirements, the nature of the learning experience, program and faculty responsibilities, and the nature of faculty-student, and student-student interaction opportunities, and requirements.
- 6.2** Department Chairs/Program Coordinators/Directors will be responsible for ensuring that all distance learning program materials clearly and accurately define any specific student background, knowledge, or technical skills needed to undertake and successfully complete the distance learning program, and describe in layman's terms any program-specific technical equipment and/or software required or recommended.
- 6.3** For any programs that are fully online, students will be able to obtain academic advisement by phone, e-mail or in-person. Technical support will be available via the Help Desk as it is for all other student populations. Program materials clearly describe how students obtain these support services.
- 6.4** The institution will provide adequate library and information resources, services, and support for academic programs, including training in information literacy. Through the FSC's Thomas D. Greenley Library web pages, access is maintained to scholarly databases and to the online catalog of materials owned by the library. Interlibrary Loan service should be accessible to distance learning students via the web page to borrow materials from our libraries. Resource material should be available electronically through this system, and also via postal delivery for items not able to be transmitted electronically.
- 6.5** Administrative processes such as admissions and registration will be readily accessible to distance learning students. Students will be provided with e-mail. Students can register online and access course schedules, grades, degree audits, financial aid and billing information through the OASIS system.
Tuition payments can be made online. Additionally, the bookstore is available via the web, and all books and course materials can be purchased online. Program materials will clearly describe how access is obtained.
- 6.6** For any programs that are fully online, the institution provides orientation opportunities and resources for distance learners that are appropriate to the technologies used, the content, and the learners.

7. Outcomes Assessment

- 7.1** Distance learning courses are expected to produce the same learning outcomes as courses that are taught in a traditional face-to-face classroom. Learning outcomes are clearly defined—in regard to student knowledge to be acquired and skill development. The procedure for assessing and evaluating these outcomes will be similar to the procedures being utilized in other online courses at Farmingdale State College.
- 7.2** All aspects of the distance learning courses taught at Farmingdale will be consistent with and created to achieve demonstrable learning outcomes. All courses are designed to be coherent; the modules each serve a purpose, and build on one another (whether sequentially or in parallel) to achieve predetermined, measurable learning outcomes. Sometimes specific courses are identified as the means of achieving specific program goals and objectives (such as writing in the discipline). It is up to each department to establish a plan for how each course fits into each program, and in particular for how courses build on one another.
- 7.3** The means chosen for assessing student learning are appropriate to the program content, course learning design, available technologies, and characteristics of the learners. The instruments used for assessing student learning online may be different from those used for assessing learning in the traditional classroom.
- 7.4** Assessment of student success across curricula, including student performance, intended learning outcomes, and student retention in online classes is conducted on a regular basis.

8. Program Evaluation

- 8.1** Farmingdale State College (FSC) should have processes in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of its programs, including distance learning programs on a regular basis, both at the course and program level. Each course or program should have assessment activities embedded within it that allow the instructor and the student to compare the extent to which learning outcomes were achieved. Examples of assessment activities employed in distance learning at FSC include surveys of current and former students, electronic portfolios, and standardized tests (in-house or externally administered). Periodic program reviews examine all programs, including distance-learning programs, for their effectiveness.
- 8.2** The protocol for the recommended student course feedback surveys is as follows:
- The faculty member sends an email invitation through the Axiom Mentor 'system to the class section that they would like to survey.
 - Students complete the survey on their own time. Alternatively, faculty members can book a computer lab and have students respond to the survey during class time. In such cases, the faculty member is not permitted in the room while students respond to the survey.
 - Faculty may give the survey as an assignment, but cannot include participation as criteria for students' final grades.
 - The survey should be administered after mid-semester but prior to finals week. Surveys administered during finals week typically have lower response rates.

- It is highly recommended that the faculty member monitor the response rate(s) of the survey(s) on Axiom and send out reminder notifications as necessary.
- Insufficient response rates will not be granted consideration.
- All surveys will be closed just prior to the release of results.
- Aggregate results will be available on Axiom after grades have been submitted for that semester. No exceptions will be made.
- Results will not be available to anyone other than the faculty member administering it, unless the faculty member chooses to grant access to their supervisor to view their results or add it to their portfolio, which can both be done by the faculty member through Axiom.
- The Office of Institutional Research shall be the administrators of the survey software, and as such, will set the dates that the surveys are closed and results can be viewed.

Alternative:

- Faculty members may select alternative surveys and utilize alternative protocols other than the one recommended by the Provost's Office. The faculty should consult either with the Provost's Office or the Office of the Dean of their School regarding the survey and the protocol they would like to utilize. Protocols that are deemed to render the results invalid will not be granted any consideration.

- 8.3** Evaluation results should be used for continuous program improvement. Program Coordinators/Directors/Chairs and instructors should monitor student progress and student complaints and develop intervention strategies utilizing academic support staff (e.g. academic advisors, tutors, the Writing Center) where needed.
- 8.4** Program evaluation procedures include a determination that distance learning programs result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the college degree or certificate awarded. All programs (traditional and online) demonstrate that students achieve deep learning. Program evaluation surveys will be administered apart from student evaluation surveys.

9. Learning Management System

- 9.1** Farmingdale State College currently uses the BLACKBOARD Learning Management System (LMS) to support online and hybrid courses for distance learning, and as a course management system to support classroom-based courses with online teaching and learning tools. The LMS allows faculty to create course content, communicate with students, set-up discussion forums, exchange course work with students, create and administer assessments, record grades, and run course reports. Open SUNY provides the technological infrastructure for the LMS, supports faculty with training specifically created for online teaching and learning, and provides helpdesk services for both students and faculty. An Academic Coordinator and Instructional Designers provide local support on campus.
- 9.2** To use BLACKBOARD as a course management system to support classroom-based courses, a faculty member does not need permission from their Chairperson and Dean. Faculty need only contact the campus Instructional Designer with their request for course management

support. Attendance at a two-hour orientation is required before courses will be enabled in LMS. All faculty teaching at Farmingdale are encouraged to utilize the course management to enhance their courses.

- 9.3** Each course, by default, will be unavailable to students until one week prior to the start of classes. Instructors using the LMS for instruction are responsible for making their course(s) available to students prior to the first day of class. Faculty members who are using the LMS as a course management system to support classroom-based courses must enable their own course shells. Directions for enabling course shells are located on the BLACKBOARD Homepage, under Tutorials for Faculty, (Course Management).
- 9.4** Twice each business day, updates are conducted on the BLACKBOARD system to add students who are enrolling in classes. Therefore, newly enrolled student's names will appear on a class page roster after an update has been completed.
- 9.5** All courses taught through the LMS are held on the LMS for 15 months, at which time they will be removed. Instructors are responsible for exporting any of the course materials they wish to archive. Instructions for archiving courses through the Learning Object Repository are located in the Blackboard Faculty area, under the Content Tab. Farmingdale State College is not responsible for archiving courses or including course statistics.
- 9.6** The LMS utilizes Course Mail, an internal messaging system, accessible via the LMS. Farmingdale State College considers Course Mail to be the exclusive vehicle for official communication related to online courses. All users are expected to regularly check their Course Mail and to acknowledge messages in a timely manner. Any course related electronic business conducted with the College must be done via Course Mail or an official FSC e-mail account.
- 9.7** Faculty interested in offering courses in a hybrid format must comply with the policies and procedures outlined below:

Hybrid Courses

Definitions

- A.** A hybrid course is defined as any course that meets both online and in a traditional classroom setting. Chairs should work with the Registrar's Office to maximize the management of classroom resources through appropriate scheduling. All other instruction will be done online through the LMS. Using the LMS as a course management tool for such purposes as posting course materials, communicating with students outside of class, etc., does not constitute a hybrid course. Hybrid courses must only be offered with prior approval from the department chair and the school dean.
- B.** Hybrid courses must be scheduled as such with the Registrar. Faculty are not permitted to change course modality after the beginning of registration or at any time during the semester.

- C.** Hybrid courses must meet the same academic rigor and standards as those offered fully online or in a traditional classroom setting.

Procedure

- A.** Faculty will consult with the campus Instructional Designer to develop the proposed format for the hybrid course.
- B.** Faculty will submit to the Distance Learning and the Registrar a Hybrid Course Proposal Form signed by the department chair and school dean in Axiom.
- C.** If they have not been trained, faculty will attend the online/hybrid course development training.
- D.** Faculty will attend an Orientation.
- E.** Prior to teaching the course for the first time, faculty will review the completed hybrid course with the campus Instructional Designer.
- F.** If a faculty member has previous experience with hybrid or online course development and delivery, he or she may schedule a meeting with the Instructional Designer to determine if their qualifications are sufficient to forgo training. Faculty will still be required to review the completed hybrid course with the campus Instructional Designer.
- G.** In subsequent semesters, existing hybrid courses will be scheduled by the Department Chair with the Distance Learning and the Registrar.

10/2015 completed 2-year review

11/2016 updated

Farmingdale State College has based its wording and format on policies and procedures regarding distance learning on the policies and procedures statements by The Sage Colleges and Plymouth State University on their websites at the following addresses:

http://www.sage.edu/resources/sageonline/faculty_resources/policies

http://www.plymouth.edu/office/online-education/files/2011/06/polices_and_procedures.pdf

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