University of San Diego
Distance Education Quality and Compliance Standards

PURPOSE

In alignment with the University of San Diego's (USD) mission and values, the purpose of this document is to establish institutional quality and compliance standards for distance education (DE); the standards apply to all programs and courses that are delivered for academic credit and meet the university's definitions of DE programs and courses. Each academic unit is responsible for ensuring all DE programs and courses in the unit are in compliance with these standards.

STANDARDS

1. Distance education (DE) at the University of San Diego aligns with the institution's mission, values, and strategic academic priorities and follows the University's established academic oversight structures.
    1.1. DE programs must be reviewed and approved through the University's Academic Program Procedures.
    1.2. DE courses must be reviewed and approved through the relevant academic unit curricular approval process.

AUTHORIZATION AND LICENSURE

2. All DE courses offered for academic credit must be scheduled in Banner using the approved scheduling codes to ensure data retrieval for compliance practices.
    2.1. Stakeholders who are responsible for the oversight or administration of DE courses or programs must complete the Distance Education Compliance Learning module.

3. All DE courses and programs must comply with federal, state, and international regulations governing where students may legally receive instruction.

3.1. State Licensure - Programs leading to state licensure are not offered as DE with the exception of students residing/learning in California.

3.2. State Authorization -

3.2.1. Academic units must proceed through the office of Online Degree Planning & Operations in Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) when offering a new DE program to ensure it meets each approved state's requirements.

3.2.2. Admissions offices and academic units are responsible for ensuring that applicants meet DE eligibility requirements before admission to the institution. They are also responsible for ensuring students who relocate during the program remain eligible to continue their studies. If the student moves to a location where the program is not authorized, the academic unit must notify the student and coordinate an appropriate transition plan. See Distance Education State Authorization Compliance Procedures

3.2.3. Academic units or the Registrar (for undergraduate summer and intersession courses only) must monitor the learner location for DE students each term to ensure compliance with state authorization regulations. See Distance Education State Authorization Compliance Procedures.

3.2.3.1. Academic advisors and academic units must inform students which states permit USD to offer DE and provide enrollment guidance based on each student's physical location during the term of enrollment.

3.2.3.2. Academic units must monitor and document each student's physical location during course registration for every term in which the student enrolls in a DE course or program. See Distance Education State Authorization Compliance Procedures.

3.2.3.3. Academic units must immediately address and correct any identified enrollment or state authorization non-compliance concerns.

3.2.4. Academic units are responsible for ensuring that instructional faculty hired to teach DE courses are located in currently authorized states or non Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) countries while teaching the course. See State Authorization Status and Compliance.

3.3. International Student Eligibility - In consultation with the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), academic units must verify

that international students enrolling in DE courses or programs meet U.S. federal regulations governing DE course participation for F-1 or J-1 visa holders. Students studying from abroad must also be verified as eligible based on the regulations of their home country or region.

4. Any arrangements with outside vendors must comply with WSCUC policy on Agreements with Unaccredited Entities and be approved through the Academic Program Procedures prior to implementing.

TECHNOLOGY

5. All technological systems used to deliver DE must be ITS supported, and compliant with accessibility and FERPA standards.
   5.1. DE platforms must follow the USD ITS Multi-factor Authentication policy.
   5.2. To ensure accessibility and data privacy and security standards, academic units may not adopt or require technologies used in DE courses or programs without review and approval from ITS.

6. DE courses must be delivered using the university's learning management system (LMS) and in accordance with the LMS Use Policy.
   6.1. ITS must adequately support the university LMS including back-ups in accordance with the USD Records Retention Policy.
   6.2. All user accounts in the LMS are created only after users are issued credentials through a University-approved system of record.
      6.2.1. User roles within the LMS are assigned based on roles specified in Banner or as requested through official procedures.

FACULTY AND PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT

7. Faculty must meet the required training or experience to meet the pedagogical expectations for DE teaching. Required training includes connection to university mission and contemporary Catholic traditions, pedagogical standards for distance education teaching, technological training, and faculty support information. (See LDC102-Online Course Facilitation as an example)
   7.1. Academic units must provide guidance and training to DE instructors to ensure instructional quality, student engagement, and curriculum integrity.

7.2. Academic units must ensure faculty who teach DE courses are integrated members of their academic units and invited to participate in curriculum development, assessment, and academic program review.

8. Faculty teaching DE courses, including both synchronous and asynchronous elements, must ensure faculty initiated regular and substantive interaction (FIRSI) and academic engagement with students as part of the teaching, learning, and assessment process in compliance with WSCUC requirements.

9. Faculty teaching DE courses with asynchronous elements must complete training offered through the Learning Design Center (LDC) to ensure they are prepared to meet institutional and federal requirements for DE.
   9.1. LDC ensures faculty are trained in use of the LMS, application of education technologies that support FIRSI, and pedagogical strategies for effective asynchronous facilitation.
   9.2. LDC provides on-demand email and phone support for application of LMS tools and integrated educational technologies.

10. Academic units must monitor faculty compliance with FIRSI, academic engagement, and pedagogical expectations by reviewing student feedback, LMS analytics, and course evaluations and providing coaching, remediation, or additional training when necessary.

CURRICULUM

11. All DE courses and programs follow the university's established governance processes for curriculum approval and continuous improvement. Faculty lead assessment of student learning, review of evidence of student achievement, and collaboration with academic program administrators and LDC instructional designers regarding continuous curriculum improvements.
   11.1. All academic programs must follow minimum standards as designed and implemented by the University Assessment Committee (UAC) in the UAC Assessment Handbook. Each academic unit is responsible for maintaining their assessment plans and findings, and making improvements based on their analysis.
   11.2. All academic programs must follow the University-approved Academic Program Review Process (Policy 6.6). The Office of Institutional Research

and Effectiveness maintains documents from each academic program in all phases of the APR process.

11.3. DE courses and programs must demonstrate academic rigor equivalent to on-site courses and programs at the same academic level (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, doctoral).

11.4. The design and instruction of DE courses and programs must comply with the USD Credit Hour Policy (Policy 6.5).

12. Asynchronous DE courses rely entirely on technology-mediated instruction and interaction which requires dedicated support for curriculum development in order to ensure academic quality, accreditation, and equitable learning.

12.1. All asynchronous DE courses must meet USD's approved standards for online course quality.

12.2. All asynchronous DE courses must be designed to meet federal requirements for FIRSI and academic engagement as defined in the university's Distance Education Terms and Coding document.

12.3. All asynchronous DE courses must meet web accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1 AA) to ensure equitable access for all students.

12.4. All asynchronous DE courses must use university-approved and university-supported technologies.

12.5. All asynchronous DE courses must meet federal and institutional credit hour requirements with sufficient academic engagement activities. See Credit Hour Calculation for Online Asynchronous Courses as a resource.

12.6. All asynchronous DE courses must comply with copyright law, licensing agreements, and fair use provisions.

13. Synchronous DE courses rely on real-time, technology-mediated instruction delivered through scheduled online class meetings. Synchronous delivery functions as a virtual classroom environment, and faculty are expected to ensure the academic quality, accreditation compliance, accessibility, and equitable learning across time zones and student circumstances. For example, if attendance in live Zoom sessions is required, instructors must make reasonable accommodations for students who are unable to attend. This includes providing access to a recording of the session and offering an alternative assignment or activity that allows students to earn an equivalent number of participation points. Alternative assignments should be comparable in scope and aligned with the learning objectives of the live session.

13.1. Synchronous sessions are scheduled in advance and follow a regular pattern that are predetermined for the semester.

13.2. All synchronous DE courses must be delivered in accordance with federal requirements for FIRSI as defined in the university's Distance Education Terms and Coding document.

13.3. All synchronous DE courses must meet federal and institutional credit hour requirements with sufficient instructional time and academic engagement activities.

STUDENT SUPPORT

14. Academic programs must provide opportunities for DE students to integrate into the life and culture of the institution using strategies such as:
    14.1. Inviting DE students to campus events,
    14.2. Inviting DE students to live or recorded virtual webinars, workshops, and events held via ITS supported web conferencing technology,
    14.3. Encouraging DE students to take advantage of career development resources,
    14.4. Offering remote and asynchronous participation for events, expanding opportunities for professional development and learning across various time zones and professional work schedules, and/or
    14.5. Inviting DE students to participate in the May Commencement ceremony upon completion of their degree requirements.

15. Academic programs must provide adequate student support services for DE students including advising, counseling, library, computing services, academic support, and other services appropriate to distance education. Academic programs must assess the efficacy of these support services as part of the academic program review process.

    Examples of strategies to promote student awareness of student support services include:
    15.1. Provide URLs and contact information within the LMS and on the syllabus for (Access this material through Canvas Commons):
        15.1.1. Library Access: All students, including DE students, have full, unrestricted access to all library resources, regardless of program modality,
        15.1.2. Academic Support: For academic guidance and support, students should consult their academic program administrator and/or program faculty,

15.1.3. Accommodations,
15.1.4. Access to TimelyCare, and
15.1.5. Access to online writing support resources.

Examples of strategies to provide dedicated support include:

15.1.6. A dedicated Academic Director to serve as a primary resource to:
- 15.1.6.1. Guide DE students through all operational processes
- 15.1.6.2. Assist with essential tasks such as registration, access to course materials, and exploring payment options,
- 15.1.6.3. Act as a liaison with essential campus partners (such as Student Accounts, Financial Aid, and ITS) to help students identify resources and/or troubleshoot administrative situations, and/or
- 15.1.6.4. Meet with the various campus departments that support the DE student population to ensure that support services are responsive and continuously updated to meet the evolving needs of DE students.

DEFINITIONS

Please see Distance Education Terms and Coding for additional definitions.

1. Academic Engagement - Academic Engagement requires active participation by a student in an instructional activity related to the student's course of study that
   a. Is defined by USD in accordance with any applicable requirements of its State or accrediting agency;
   b. Includes, but is not limited to:
      i. Attending a synchronous class, lecture, recitation, or field or laboratory activity, on-site or via distance education, where there is an opportunity for interaction between the instructor and students;
      ii. Submitting an academic assignment;
      iii. Taking an assessment or an exam;
      iv. Participating in an interactive tutorial, webinar, or other interactive computer- assisted instruction;
      v. Participating in a study group, group project, or an online discussion that is assigned by the institution; or

vi. Interacting with an instructor about academic matters (WSCUC, 2023).

2. Academic Director - The Academic Director (AD) provides academic leadership and strategic oversight for the DE program. This role supports curriculum development, instruction, and student advising. The AD serves as the primary academic contact for faculty, students, and institutional partners, ensuring the program maintains high standards of quality, relevance, and consistency. Academic units may have different terms for this role (e.g., Program Director)

3. Academic Unit - Academic unit is defined in Policy 1.5 to include the following entities: College of Arts & Sciences, Knauss School of Business, School of Law, School of Leadership and Education Sciences, Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science, Kroc School of Peace Studies, Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering, and the University Library. For the purpose of this document the term academic unit also includes Professional and Continuing Education.

4. Accessibility - A set of web accessibility standards ensuring all digital course content is usable by students with disabilities. (See Department of Justice Fact Sheet and University of Wisconsin Interpretation)

5. Credit Hour - The requirement that DE courses include instructional time and academic engagement activities equivalent to the federally defined credit hour and Academic Policy 6.5 - USD Credit Hour Policy.

6. FIRSI - Faculty engage students in regular (e.g., predictable and scheduled) and substantive interaction through teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:
    a. Providing direct instruction;
    b. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
    c. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course;
    d. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course; or
    e. Other instructional activities approved by WSCUC or a program accrediting agency.

    USD ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor(s) prior to the student's completion of a course by:
    a. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course; and

b. Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed based on such monitoring, or upon request by the student (WSCUC, 2023).

7. Instructional Designer - A staff member in the Learning Design Center who partners with faculty to design distance education (DE) courses that meet pedagogical, accessibility, and compliance standards.
8. Learning Management System (LMS) - The university-approved digital platform (Canvas) used to deliver course materials, assessments, communication, and instructional activities for DE courses.
9. State Authorization - The legal requirement that USD obtain approval, exemption, or reciprocity (e.g., NC-SARA participation) to offer DE in a student's state or country of residence.

Created by USD DE Procedures Working Group, approved by the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, reviewed with academic units.
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