

Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education

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Background

Recognizing that most accredited institutions are making use of the growing range of modalities for delivery of instructional and educational programs and services, including various electronic means, the Commission has adopted a policy based on principles of good practice to help ensure that distance learning is characterized by the same expectations for quality, integrity, and effectiveness that apply to more traditional modes of instruction.

This policy reflects the federal regulatory requirements regarding distance education and correspondence education.

Definition of Distance Education

Distance Education means [34 CFR §602.3]:

Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) 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) audioconferencing; 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).

Definition of Correspondence Education

Correspondence education means [34 CFR §602.3]:

- (1) education provided through one or more courses by an institution 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.
- (2) interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
- (3) correspondence courses are typically self-paced.
- (4) correspondence education is not distance education.

Policy

Commission policy specifies that all learning opportunities provided by accredited institutions must have equivalent quality, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, regardless of mode of delivery. This policy provides a framework that allows institutions the flexibility to adapt their delivery modes to the emerging needs of students and society while maintaining quality. Any institution offering courses and programs through distance education or correspondence education is expected to meet the requirements of accreditation in each of its courses and programs and at each of its sites.

Policy Elements

- development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education, must take place within the institution's total educational mission.
- institutions are expected to control development, implementation, and evaluation of all courses and programs offered in their names, including those offered via distance education or correspondence education.
- institutions are expected to have clearly defined and appropriate student learning outcomes for all courses and programs, including those delivered through distance education or correspondence education.
- institutions are expected to provide the resources and structure needed to accomplish these outcomes and to demonstrate that their students achieve these outcomes through application of appropriate assessment.
- institutions are expected to provide the Commission advance notice of intent to initiate a new delivery mode, such as distance education or correspondence education, through the Substantive Change process.
- institutions are expected to provide the Commission advance notice of intent to offer a program, degree or certificate in which 50% or more of the courses are via distance education or correspondence education, through the Substantive Change process. For purposes of this requirement, the institution is responsible for calculating the percentage of courses that may be offered through distance or correspondence education.
- institutions which offer distance education or correspondence education must have processes in place through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence course or program is the same person who participates every time in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit¹. This requirement will be met if the institution verifies the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the institution's discretion, such methods as a secure log-in and password, proctored examinations, other technologies and/or practices that are developed and effective in verifying each student's identification. The institution must also publish policies that ensure the protection of student privacy and will notify students at the time of class registration of any charges associated with verification of student identity [34 CFR§602.17g].

¹ See Addendum: WCET Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education Version 2.0, June 2009.



Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education

Version 2.0, June 2009

This list of best practice strategies is based on "Institutional Policies/Practices and Course Design Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education," produced by WCET in February 2009 and updated in April 2009. In May 2009, the Instructional Technology Council (ITC) surveyed its membership to invite feedback and additional strategies to enhance the WCET work. This June 2009 document reflects the combined contributions of WCET, the UT TeleCampus of the University of Texas System, and ITC. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States license.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND COMMITMENT

1. Establish a campus-wide policy on academic integrity that articulates faculty and student responsibilities.
2. Demonstrate an institutional commitment to enforcing the policy and in supporting faculty and staff in the handling of academic integrity matters.
3. Make information on academic integrity easy to find on the campus Web site, library Web site, department Web site, course, within the syllabus and within specific assignments.
4. Include ethics instruction within the core curriculum and/or area-specific within degree plans.
5. Address academic integrity at student orientation programs and events.
6. Encourage faculty to report every suspected violation and act upon it.
7. Secure student logins and password to access online courses and related resources, discussions, assignments and assessments.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. State the academic integrity/academic honesty policy within the online learning environment and discuss it early in the course.
2. Require student engagement with the academic integrity policy. For example:
 - a. Ask students for their input on how to create a community of integrity at the start of the course. This establishes the students as stakeholders in the community and the process of its formation.
 - b. Develop and ask students to commit to a class honor code.
 - c. Require students to read and sign an agreement to the campus academic integrity policy.
 - d. Write a letter to students about integrity and post it in the course.
 - e. Ask students to restate the academic integrity policy (this can also be used as a writing sample to use when grading and reviewing student work).
 - f. Ask students to reflect on the academic integrity policy in the discussion board.
 - g. Include a lesson on avoiding plagiarism.
3. Have assignments and activities in which appropriate sharing and collaboration is essential to successful completion. Foster a community of integrity by choosing authentic learning tasks that require group cohesiveness and effort. For example, focus assignments on distinctive, individual, and non-duplicative tasks or on what individual students self-identify as their personal learning needs.
4. Provide students with a course or course lesson on research and/or study skills. Work with library staff to design assignments and prepare materials on plagiarism and research techniques.

5. Include a statement that the instructor reserves the right to require alternative forms and/or locations of assessments (e.g., proctoring).
6. Ask students follow-up questions to assignments such as, "expand upon this statement you made," "tell me why you chose this phrase, description or reference," and "expand upon the ideas behind this reference."
7. Select one or two difficult concepts from the paper and ask the student to restate/rewrite the information.
8. Require students to share key learning from references for a paper or self-reflection on an assignment in the discussion board.
9. Include an ethical decision-making case study within the course.

FACULTY SUPPORT¹

1. Incorporate academic integrity strategies into professional development and faculty training offerings.
2. Publish academic integrity strategies and policies in faculty handbook and Web-based faculty resources.
3. Publish guidelines for handling/reporting individual student infractions.
4. Assign a department academic integrity liaison to support faculty.
5. Use a plagiarism detection service.
6. Use Google to search for a unique text string or unique phrase from the paper.
7. Keep student papers filed in the department by topic for reference.

STUDENT SUPPORT

1. Define academic integrity and cheating and clearly explain what is considered dishonest and unacceptable behavior.
2. Provide information and examples to help students understand the difference between collaboration on assignments and cheating, and identify plagiarism. Teach the proper use of citations.
3. State how much collaboration is permissible on each assignment.
4. State what the instructor's expectations are for the students and explain what they should expect from the instructor. For example:

¹ The ACCJC recommends the use of any appropriate search engine.

- a. Include a statement in the syllabus encouraging honest work.
 - b. Repeat the campus academic integrity statement and provide a link to campus policies.
 - c. Describe academic dishonesty.
 - d. Describe the repercussions for academic dishonesty.
 - e. Describe permissible and impermissible collaboration.
 - f. Include outside links to information on plagiarism, self-tests and examples.
 - g. Include information on acceptable sources.
 - h. Include information about the college's writing center, library or other support.
5. Provide a writing style sheet or handbook with information on plagiarism and campus policies.
 6. Indicate assessments may require follow-up documentation, questions or assignments.
 7. State expectations for the time needed to complete coursework.
 8. State whether the instructor/college will use a plagiarism detection service.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

1. Provide rubrics, or detailed grading criteria, for every assignment at the beginning of the course so students understand how they will be graded.
2. Train faculty on ways to use the settings on the college's learning management system to reduce cheating:
 - a. Use a test bank with more questions than will be used on any particular test and have the learning management system pull a smaller number of questions from the test bank
 - b. Randomize the order of answers for multiple test questions so for example, the correct answer for a particular question might be "a" for one student and "b" for another.
 - c. Require forced completion on exams so students cannot re-enter a test.
 - d. Set a short window for testing completion, i.e. one or two days to take an exam rather than a whole week. Setting a completion time reduces a student's ability to access the test, look up the answer, and re-enter the test.

- Most test-taking software applications keep track of time on the server, not on the student's computer.
- e. Password protect exams.
 - f. Show questions one at a time (makes more difficult for students to copy and paste the test in order to give it to someone else).
 - g. Use a Web browser lock-down service during testing.
 - h. Check the computer "properties" for the "creation date" and "author" for essay or term paper submissions if students are suspected of submitting work created by someone else.
3. Clarify that students with disabilities and requesting testing accommodations (extended time for completion of examinations and quizzes) must identify themselves to the college's office of disabilities and provide appropriate documentation.
 4. Change test items and assignment topics each semester.
 5. Emphasize assignments that require written work and problem solving (e.g., essays, papers, online discussions).
 6. Use a variety of assessment strategies (quizzes, short and long papers, test questions that require the application of a theory or concept).
 7. Adopt the following practices to encourage authentic written work:
 - a. Require students to turn in copies of reference articles with cited text highlighted.
 - b. Require annotated bibliographies.
 - c. Do not allow last minute changes in assignment topics.
 - d. Require specific references be used (this might be the course text).
 - e. Require an abstract.
 - f. Give narrow assignment topics (tied into class experience) and require thesis statements prior to topic approval.
 - g. Require students to turn in a draft, and their bibliography or references prior to the paper's due date.
 - h. Require students to write a concept paper and project plan prior to completing an assignment.
 8. Evaluate the research process and the product.
 9. After an assignment is due, have students post in the discussion board, describing the assignment and the research method used, a summary of conclusions and an abstract (a meta-learning essay).
 10. When evaluating student written work, consider following these practices:
 - a. Be wary of student writing that reads like an encyclopedia, newspaper article or expert in the field.
 - b. Look for whether a paper reflects the assignment, has changes in tense, includes odd sentences within a well-written paper, is based on references older than three years, refers to past events as current, or uses jargon.
 - c. Compare student writing on the discussion board with that on assignments and papers. A writing sample collected at the start of the semester can be helpful.
 - d. Compare the writing at the beginning and end of the paper with that in the middle of the paper -- language, sentence length and reading level.
 - e. Check references; compare quotations with cited sources; look for the same author in multiple references.
 - f. Read all papers on the same topic together.
 11. Make assignments cumulative (students turn in parts of a project or paper throughout the semester).
 12. Give open book exams.
 13. Other than grades, do not provide students feedback on tests until all of the students in the class have completed them.
 14. Use proctored test sites where appropriate.
 15. Faculty should use a robust user name and password to protect their computer-based grade book and keep a printed copy in a secure place in case students are able to hack into the computer system.

SOURCES

"101 Ways to Maintain Academic Integrity in an Online Course," by Michael Anderson and Lori McNabb, UT TeleCampus, The University of Texas System. Handout for faculty development program.

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"Institutional Policies/Practices and Course Design Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education," by WCET Working Group on Academic Integrity and Student Verification. February 2009 and revised April 2009.

Instructional Technology Council Survey on Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education, May 2009.



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