

## **Distance Education/Online Education**

### **Policy Description**

Winthrop University recognizes the goal of distance education to provide a high quality education to learners including present students as well as those who are in underserved areas. This policy outlines the process and expectations for developing and delivering courses by distance learning.

### **Policy Procedures**

#### **Definition:**

Distance Education/Online Education is defined as the process where on-campus and off-campus learners can access course-related or training-related materials, resources, and communication via synchronous (live interactive) or asynchronous (anytime-anywhere) delivery methods through web conferencing, and/or a Learning Management System (LMS). Winthrop University defines distance learners as students who receive entire programs and or/course content through the aforementioned delivery systems. It is assumed that instructors are not in the same location as the students they are instructing.

The University's institutional commitment to the development and offering of online courses and programs follows best practices as outlined in the following SACSCOC Federal Requirements (FR): 4.8.1 Student Identity—Online Learning; 4.8.2 Student privacy—Online Learning; and 4.8.3 Additional fee disclosure- Online Learning. In addition, this policy is informed by the SACSCOC Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs (2000) and SACSCOC Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education (2014).

The responsibility and authority for adherence to this policy ultimately resides with the Division of Academic Affairs/Office of the Provost; however, that responsibility is shared with deans, department chairs, and faculty as appropriate.

#### **Mission Statement:**

The mission of our distance education/online education program is as follows to:

1. Provide a high quality education (course and/or program), consistent with the institution's role and mission, to a diverse community of learners through an environment where learning may take place at a distance.
2. Serve the higher education and professional needs of learners in a range of academic and professional course work in business and industry, public schools, and the community.
3. Enable students to fulfill their degree requirements or receive professional training and development.

4. Provide ongoing and sustainable training and support for online instruction to both students and instructors.

**Admissions:**

Admission to a distance education program or an online course or programs follows the requirements of the university, program, or certificate as outlined in the appropriate catalogs or website. All online courses and programs comply with accreditation requirements. Students should be informed throughout the recruitment and application process of the instructional delivery systems and technologies used in their courses/programs. Admitted students will be informed of the technical competence required of students to complete the course or program.

At the time of admission/registration, students must be provided with clear instructions regarding how to access the course and course materials necessary to successfully complete their programs; detailed description of the course requirements, including site-based experiences; the online components of each course (whether hybrid or 100% online); and the time frame in which the course or program will be offered.

**Guidelines for Course Curriculum Development and Instruction:*****Instructors***

Responsibility for the academic content of online courses is vested in the academic department and college from which the course originates. Online courses should take advantage of the medium while maintaining the rigor and academic standards of conventional course offerings. In determining whether an online modality is an appropriate format to deliver a particular course, consideration should be made on whether a high quality, comprehensive learning experience can be delivered relative to the discipline involved.

It is the responsibility of faculty to:

1. Consider the amount of learning, mastery, or competency the learner is expected to demonstrate at the completion of the course or program and the technical competence requirements of students to complete the program.
2. Ensure that the curriculum design of each online course or program includes sufficient interaction between faculty and students through the use of synchronous and/or asynchronous instructional strategies.
3. Link student learning objectives to their assessments. Students must be given the opportunity to evaluate the course using the approved instruments of the respective college and the online assessment instrument. The length of the course should, in most cases, parallel that of conventional course offerings.

4. Ensure the integrity of all content used in distance learning course materials, including accuracy, currency, and compliance with laws regarding copyright, accessibility, and related University policies (See Copyright Policy: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=4>).
5. Identify expectations of student time commitment necessary to complete course requirements successfully.
6. Require an initial online submission within the session drop/add period. Students who do not submit may be dropped from the roster.
7. Consult with the Office of Online Learning in the course design and planning stages.

*Course Management:* The following statement should appear in each syllabus: "Students who are enrolled in online courses are entitled to the campus resources made available to on-campus students. These resources include admissions counseling and health services, library, student services, and recreational facilities. Questions regarding access to these resources should be directed to the assigned academic advisor."

For reporting purposes, attendance is based on course activity participation. The definition of absence should be operationally defined in the course syllabus.

### ***Departments/Colleges***

Responsibility for the academic content of online courses is vested in the academic department/college from which the course originates. It is the responsibility of departments and colleges to consider the following tasks.

1. The development of new online learning courses and/or programs must follow the same procedures of academic review as conventional course offerings.
2. When course sections are offered via distance learning or face-to face, the sections must have identical catalog course descriptions and student learning outcomes.
3. Academic units are responsible for developing distance learning enrollment cap policies consistent with best practices in their disciplines and/or accreditation mandates and appropriate University standards of practice.

### ***University (Academic Affairs/Office of the Provost)***

It is the administrative responsibility of the University to consider the following tasks.

1. Ensure that students are informed about any fees or charges associated with the enrollment in online courses or programs, including charges related to the verification of student identity.
2. Provide the technical support necessary for the technology required for each specific course including but not limited to hardware, software, and learning management system.
3. Ensure that online degree or certificate programs, offered by the institution, are sustained long enough for students enrolled in the program to complete it within a reasonable amount of time, regardless of program changes or revisions.
4. Ensure that appropriate systems are in place to protect the privacy, safety, and security of student information as outlined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).
5. Provide for regular and necessary updates of the technology employed in the delivery of online courses and programs.
6. Strive to minimize the impact on students and faculty when technology updates occur so as to allow adequate time for necessary notification and training.
7. Provide qualified staff and an organizational structure necessary to support online courses and programs that are operational and those in development.
8. Maintain and revise policies to ensure ongoing compliance with copyright law.
9. Ensure that student identity is verified for the participation in and completion of online courses and programs, including identity verification for assessment of student learning (See <http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=313>).
10. Facilitate transfer credits and articulation agreements for online programs in the same manner as our campus-based programs.
11. Require, in cases when facilities are provided through contractual agreements, provisions within these contracts that assure the reliability of facilities necessary to complete online courses and programs to protect the privacy, safety, and security of student information.

**Training and Technical Support:**

Online learning services at Winthrop University are provided through the Office of Online Learning. This office administers the learning management system, maintains the

users, courses, and enrollments in the system; provides technical assistance and training to both students and faculty, and provides instructional design support for faculty. Training for students and faculty in the use of online resources is provided in many ways.

### ***Student Training***

A self-paced orientation training module is available within the learning management system for students. Students will be provided with strategies for succeeding as an online learner. Online training tutorials and resources are available on the Winthrop University Online Learning website at [www.winthrop.edu/onlinelearning](http://www.winthrop.edu/onlinelearning). The website includes log-in instructions, news and updates, system requirements, troubleshooting tips, print- and video-based training resources for students, and tips for successful online learning. Support documentation is also available within the learning management system.

### ***Faculty Training***

Group and individual instructional training sessions are provided on an on-going basis on a variety of topics including Blackboard Basics, Interactive Tools, Assessments, Grading, and Interactive Rubrics. Registration for training sessions is available online or by contacting the Office of Online Learning. Online training tutorials and resources for the learning management system are available on the Winthrop University Online Learning website. The website includes login instructions, news and updates, system requirements, print- and video-based training and instructional resources for instructors, and answers to frequently asked questions.

In addition, training sessions are available to faculty who wish to develop and teach an online course. The training sessions are designed to assist faculty with the initial development of a course into the online format. The topics covered are online course design standards, faculty expectations for facilitating online courses, and best practices for assessment in online courses, including creating secure, monitored online tests, and ways to deter cheating (see Instructional Resources for Online Instructors at <http://www.winthrop.edu/onlinelearning/default.aspx?id=27788> -).

### **Online Program Development:**

The development of new programs to be delivered either partially or totally online must follow the process outlined in the University Policy on Proposals on New and Revised Degree Programs, Options, and Off-Site Offerings of Existing Degrees (<http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=179>).

Existing programs that offer 25% or more course work via distance learning must follow in advance specific protocols outlined by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Program review processes differ depending on how many course hours are offered via distance learning. Faculty and program coordinators need to consult with the Office of Academic Affairs at the beginning of the online program planning process.

Additional policies: See Verification of Student Identity in Distance Educational Policy, <http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=313>

Student IT Handbook <http://www2.winthrop.edu/public/policy/fullpolicy.aspx?pid=313>

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