

Policy Title

Online Education Policy

Policy Description

Winthrop University recognizes the value of online education in advancing its mission to “provide personalized and challenging undergraduate, graduate, and continuing professional education programs of national caliber within a context dedicated to public service to the nation and to the State of South Carolina.” As such, the University is committed to providing high quality online education to a diverse population of learners with a wide range of needs. Students within the state, the nation, and the world benefit from the knowledge and expertise of Winthrop University faculty.

The Online Education Policy applies to all faculty and staff engaged in the delivery of online education courses or programs, and students registering for, enrolled in, and receiving credit for online education courses or programs. The responsibility and authority for adherence to this policy resides with the Division of Academic Affairs/Office of the Provost, with that responsibility shared with deans, department chairs, and faculty, as appropriate.

The University’s institutional commitment to the development and offering of online courses and programs follows best practices and is informed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) [Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education](#) and the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) [Guiding Principles for Distance Education in South Carolina](#).

Strategic Vision and Guiding Principles for Online Education

The Strategic Vision for Online Education aligns with the [Winthrop Plan](#) to be a national model for providing a supportive, high-quality, and affordable educational experience that has a positive impact on students and the community. Winthrop University will deliver an online educational experience that enhances access, meets emerging needs and interests, and maintains the quality of the Winthrop experience for diverse student populations.

Guiding Principles for Online Education

Education at Winthrop University is built upon a fundamental commitment to academic quality. To deliver online education that maintains the rigor, academic standards, and quality Winthrop experience expected of our campus-based programs, Winthrop University commits to the following guiding principles:

Student-Centered Experience

Winthrop University is committed to providing a student-centered university experience. Quality online education requires individualized student attention, which is reflected in class size, an online student orientation and advising component, opportunities for interaction and collaboration with faculty and peers, rigorous coursework that prepares students for a successful career, and responsive technical support. Online students are provided access to

institutional student support services, activities, and programs that are consistent with the University's mission, promote student learning, and enhance student development.

Ongoing Support for Faculty

Winthrop University is committed to providing ongoing faculty support for effective and dynamic online instruction through a variety of approaches, including professional development opportunities, specialized training courses on online course design and facilitation standards, training resources, instructional design services, and responsive technical support.

Provision and Support for Emerging Technology

Winthrop University is committed to providing and supporting emerging technology that delivers and enhances the academic experience for all users. Emerging academic and learning technologies that are appropriate and accessible to students, faculty, and staff will be used effectively to support online education.

Definitions

Online Education: An educational environment in which online and land-based learners can access course-related or training-related materials, resources, and communication via synchronous (live interactive) or asynchronous (anytime-anywhere) delivery methods via web conferencing and/or a Learning Management System (LMS). Generally, instructors are not in the same location as the students they are teaching.

Online Learners: Students who receive entire programs and/or course content virtually via web conferencing and/or a Learning Management System.

Online Program: A program in which the entirety of the program is delivered virtually via the Learning Management System.

Online Course: A course in which all required contact hours are completed exclusively via the Learning Management System.

Hybrid 25%+ Program: A program in which at least 25%, but less than 100%, of the degree credits are earned virtually via the Learning Management System.

Hybrid 25%+ Course: A course in which at least 25%, but less than 100%, of the required contact hours are completed virtually via the Learning Management System.

Land-based Program: A program in which less than 25% of the degree credits are earned virtually via the Learning Management System.

SACSCOC – Definition of Distance Education

“For the purposes of the Commission on College’s accreditation review, distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.” SACSCOC – *Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education*

CHE – Definition of Distance Education

“Most simply defined as electronic instruction delivered at a different place than where the instructor is located or at a different time than when the instructor teaches the class, distance learning presents higher education with opportunities and challenges of a magnitude seldom encountered in the last 50 years.” CHE – *Guiding Principles for Distance Education in South Carolina*

Curriculum and Instruction

Appropriately credentialed faculty are responsible for the design, development, implementation, and revision of online courses/programs. Winthrop University requires all online courses/programs to provide academic rigor and quality consistent with land-based courses/programs. Accordingly, course syllabi, student learning outcomes and expectations, and course evaluations for online courses reflect standards and practices consistent with land-based courses.

Faculty are responsible for the integrity of all content used in online course materials, including accuracy, currency, and compliance with laws regarding copyright. They are expected to follow all aspects of the [Copyright Policy](#).

The development and approval of new programs, regardless of delivery mode (land-based, hybrid 25%+, or online), follow the academic program approval process outlined in the [Proposals on New and Revised Degree Programs, Options, and Off-Site Offerings of Existing Degrees Policy](#).

All academic programs, regardless of delivery mode (land-based, hybrid 25%+, and online), engage in institutional assessment efforts, including annual reports, annual continuous improvement reports, and academic program reviews or accreditation reviews, as appropriate.

Winthrop University employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of mode of delivery. The [Credit Hour Policy](#) and procedures conform to federal policy and best practices.

Faculty

Faculty engaged in delivering online courses/programs must meet the same qualification requirements as those teaching land-based courses. Winthrop gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline, with preference given to an earned doctorate or

terminal degree in the teaching discipline. Other considerations include master's degree work, related work experience in the field, professional licensure, and certifications.

Winthrop University acknowledges that the quality of online courses/programs and subsequent student success is dependent upon well-trained, supported faculty. All faculty must have approval from their department chair to develop and teach an online course. Prior to teaching an online or hybrid 25%+ course, faculty members are required to demonstrate the requisite skills and knowledge needed to effectively deliver the curriculum.

The [Online Teaching Certification](#) (OTC), a university-wide initiative, qualifies faculty to teach in the online environment. OTC is achieved through one of the following three ways: (1) completing two mandatory online training courses (WOTC 101-Online Course Design and Development Basics and WOTC-102 Online Course Facilitation and Management), (2) submitting evidence of successfully completing equivalent training offered by an approved university partner or vendor, or (3) applying for an alternative skills evaluation, if eligible. Successful completion of WOTC 101, or its equivalent, is required for faculty to receive instructional design support. OTC is valid for a set time period, after which recertification is required, ensuring that faculty remain current with Winthrop's [Strategic Vision for Online Education](#). Additional group and individual professional development activities and instructional training sessions are provided on an on-going basis through the Office of Online Learning.

Performance review is consistent across faculty, regardless of the mode of delivery through which they engage students in the learning process. While procedures may vary across academic colleges, all tenure-track and tenured Winthrop University faculty are [assessed](#) via (1) student evaluations of instruction, (2) annual reports addressing performance in instruction, scholarship, and service, (3) pre-tenure review, (4) [tenure review](#), and (5) [post-tenure review](#). Non-tenure track faculty are assessed via (1) student evaluations of instruction and (2) annual reports addressing performance in instruction, scholarship, and service, as applicable.

Technology and Technical Support

The Winthrop University community recognizes that information technology has become an integral resource in advancing online education. The [Winthrop University Policy on the Appropriate Use of Information Technology Resources](#) intends to establish a framework of responsible, considerate, and ethical behavior expected of all faculty and students engaged in the online environment.

Winthrop University's policy regarding information security and the protection of student privacy is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All faculty, regardless of mode of delivery, must comply with Winthrop University's [Privacy of Educational Records Policy](#).

The University must authenticate the identity of all online students to remain in compliance with the provisions of the United States Federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). As indicated in Winthrop University's [Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education Policy](#),

at a minimum, all online students are required to use a unique username and password, obtained through the University, in order to access online course materials.

Technical support services for faculty, staff, and students are provided through the Winthrop University Office of Online Learning and the IT Service Desk. The Office of Online Learning administers the learning management system; maintains the users, courses, and enrollments in the system; provides technical assistance and training; and provides instructional design support for the development of quality, accessible online, hybrid, and technology-enhanced courses. The IT Service Desk provides user account and log-in support for the learning management system. Online training tutorials and resources for the learning management system are available on the Winthrop University Online Learning website for [faculty/staff](#) and [students](#). Additionally, IT provides an informational section on the Learning Management System as part of their [FAQ](#).

Library and Learning Resources

To promote learning, students enrolled in online courses/programs have remote access to scholarly information, resources, and research instruction through the Winthrop University [Ida Jane Dacus library](#). Full-text databases, bibliographic indexes, and the Dacus Online catalog are available on the library's website. The library provides a wide range of online research guides and individualized research consultations by online chat, text, email, phone, or in-person. Subject librarians are available to faculty teaching in the online environment, assisting them in acquiring online materials, providing library instruction sessions, and holding student research consultations.

The stewardship of intellectual property, produced by faculty, staff, and students is an important responsibility of both those who create these byproducts of human knowledge and the University sponsoring them. Winthrop University's [Intellectual Property Rights Policy](#) applies to all faculty, staff, and students, regardless if engaged in land-based or online environments.

Academic and Student Services

Students enrolled in online education courses/programs have access to services comparable to those provided for students in land-based courses/programs, including, but not limited to academic support (e.g., academic advising, accessibility services, library), administrative support (e.g., registrar, student financial services office, financial aid, bookstore), student services support (e.g., counseling, career services, international student services), and technical support.

Students in online education courses/programs have access to procedures for resolving complaints, as noted in the [Student Handbook](#).

Admission

Admission criteria for a particular online course/program are followed, as outlined on the appropriate University or program website. Students seeking admission to online

courses/programs must satisfy the same requirements for admission to the University, to the program, and to academic credit courses, as are required of land-based students.

Students are apprised throughout the recruitment and application process of the instructional delivery systems and technologies used in their course/program. Admitted students are informed of the technical competence required to complete the course/program.

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)

Winthrop University abides by all requirements outlined in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), which oversees and sets comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. Winthrop faculty cannot offer online courses and programs in states that do not have SARA approval, unless Winthrop has received separate approval from that state. Access to Winthrop University's online courses and programs is available to all students in SARA states.

Policy Procedures

Policy Author(s)

Academic Affairs

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