AP 4105 – Distance Education

Approved by Leadership: December 2014


The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 defines distance education as education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously and asynchronously.

Student Authentication

Consistent with federal regulations pertaining to federal financial aid eligibility, the District authenticates or verifies that the student who registers in a distance education course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit.

The District provides to each student, at the time of registration, a statement of the process in place to protect student privacy and estimated additional student charges associated with verification of student identity, if any.

The Vice President for Student Learning and Economic Development utilizes one or more of these methods to authenticate or verify the student’s identity:

- secure credentialing through username and password
- proctor examinations
- use new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification

A Culture of Integrity

Each distance education instructor completes a series of training workshops and a course review which considers best practices in constructing online courses that minimize the opportunity for cheating.

The District encourages faculty to set high standards for performance in distance education courses.

The Student Handbook, available to each student, establishes a campus-wide policy on academic integrity, including for distance education courses.

Course Approval

The review and approval of new and existing distance education courses follows the curriculum approval procedures outlined in Administrative Procedures 4020, Program and Curriculum Development. Distance education courses are approved under the same conditions and criteria as all other courses.
Separate approval by the Curriculum Committee of each proposed or existing course is mandatory if any portion of the instruction in a course or a course section is designed to be provided through distance education.

Distance education courses must also be approved by the Distance Learning Committee before they can be taught.

**Course Certification**

When approving distance education courses, the Distance Learning Committee, a standing committee of the Academic Senate, certifies the following:

- **Course Quality Standards**: The same standards of course quality are applied to the distance education courses as are applied to traditional classroom courses, including “instructor presence” as defined by the Distance Learning Committee and approved by the Curriculum Committee, Academic Senate, and District.

- **Course Quality Determinations**: Determinations and judgments about the quality of the distance education courses are made with the full involvement of the Distance Learning Committee.

**Instructor Contact**

Each section of the course that is delivered through distance education includes “regular effective contact” between instructor and students in accord with the procedures adopted by the Distance Learning Committee:

As per Title V, section 55211(a), all distance learning courses, whether hybrid, fully online, or telecourse, will include “regular effective contact” which Butte College defines as follows:

1. **Initiated Interaction**
   Instructors regularly initiate interaction with students to determine whether they are accessing, comprehending, and participating in course activities.

2. **Frequency**
   (a) Since distance learning courses are considered the electronic equivalent of face-to-face courses, the frequency of the contact is at least the same as would occur in a comparable face-to-face course.
   
   (b) At a minimum, the number of instructor contact hours per week normally available to face-to-face students is also available, in synchronous or asynchronous mode, to distance learning students.

3. **Expectations**
   The instructor’s specific policies regarding the frequency and timeliness of instructor initiated contact and feedback are part of the syllabus or other course documents made available to students at the start of the course.

4. **Instructor absences**
   (a) If an illness, family emergency, or other unexpected reason prevents the instructor from continuing regular contact, the instructor or department informs students within the course when regular contact is likely to resume.

   (b) In the event of prolonged absence, the instructor makes appropriate arrangements for class continuation.
5. **Timely contact**
   Online instructors are responsible to respond and provide feedback to students in a timely fashion.

6. **Types of contact**
   For distance education courses, instructors select as appropriate from the following resources:
   
   (a) Threaded discussion forums with appropriate instructor participation, including a threaded discussion set aside for general questions about the course
   
   (b) General email
   
   (c) Announcements in the Learning Management System
   
   (d) Instructor and/or publisher materials that create the “virtual equivalent” of the face-to-face class in the particular discipline
   
   (e) Synchronous communication, such as chat or live video conferencing
   
   (f) Other forms of communication, such as group meetings or virtual field trips

**Student Services**

The Vice President for Student Services regularly reviews the range of student services appropriate to support the distance education courses offered, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, placement, and counseling.

**Facilities and Finances**

The District regularly reviews the adequacy of equipment, maintenance and support personnel to ensure the effectiveness of the distance education offerings.

Facilities, staffing, equipment, and other resources associated with the viability and effectiveness of the college’s distance education offerings are an integral part of the institution’s long-range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes.

**Duration of Approval**

All distance education courses approved under this procedure will continue to be in effect, subject to periodic formal course evaluation, as negotiated, unless there are substantive changes of the Course Outline of Record (COR).

Revised: 7/02, 8/03, 8/06, 8/07, 2/08, 7/11, 10/14