

# COLLEGE of CHARLESTON

## OFFICIAL DIVISIONAL POLICY Academic Affairs Division

### Policy on Distance Education

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#### 1.0 Mission Statement for Distance Education

The Distance Education Program provides leadership, coordination, management, and support to distance and online activities of the College of Charleston by collaboratively working across the college community. The program seeks to extend the College of Charleston campus across the state of South Carolina and beyond, provide an environment where learning can take place any time and any place, and share the knowledge and expertise of College of Charleston faculty to benefit society and support the economic vitality of South Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The development of the Distance Education Program and of the current policy has been the work of the 2009 *ad hoc* Distance Education Committee; the 2012 *ad hoc* Distance Education Task Force; the membership of the Distance Education Steering Committee; the Deans; and various academic administrators in the Office of the Provost. Faculty and administrative contributors to this work have included Lancie Alfonso (Computer Science), Susan Beattie (Information Technology), David Desplaces (Management and Marketing), Beverly Diamond (Provost's Office), Jo Ann Ewalt (Political Science), Doug Ferguson (Communication), Melissa Ferrara (Communication), Janette Finch (Library), Lynne Ford (Office of the Provost), Kem Fronabarger (Geology), Sylvia Gamboa (Summer School), Godfrey Gibbison (North Campus), Beth Goodier (Communication), Karen Hakim-Butt (Health and Human Performance), Zach Hartje (Information Technology), Debby Jeter (Mathematics), Joe Kelly (English), Marie Manning (Teacher Education), Renee McCauley (Computer Science), Amy McCandless (Graduate School), Renee Mueller (Management and Marketing), Pamela Niesslein (Office of the Provost), Amy Ostrom (Information Technology), David Parisi (Communication), Bob Perkins (Teacher Education), Michael Phillips (Summer School), Aspen Olmsted (Computer Science), Sue Sommer-Kresse (Office of the Provost), Melissa Thomas (Center for Student Learning), Myra Whittemore (Assessment), and Robin Zemp (Music).

Distance education courses must comply with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) *Principles of Accreditation*. The relevant SACSCOC policy statements apply to both degree and certificate programs and the courses associated with those programs.

## 2.0 SACSCOC Definition of Distance Education

The following definition of distance education (hereafter, “DE”) is provided in the SACSCOC Policy Statement on *Distance and Correspondence 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.”<sup>2</sup> Additional information on the SACSCOC definitions for distance education and correspondence education is available in the most recent version of the SACSCOC Policy Statement on *Distance and Correspondence Education* and at [sacscoc.org](http://sacscoc.org).

## 3.0 SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation for Distance Education

The College of Charleston (hereafter, “College”) follows the principles and standards of SACSCOC, its regional accreditor, as published in the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation*, in the SACSCOC Policy Statement on *Distance and Correspondence Education*, and in such other relevant policy statements or accreditation standards as may be promulgated by SACSCOC.

Please note that the standards outlined in the SACSCOC Policy Statement on *Distance and Correspondence Education* have been adapted from the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* specifically to address DE concerns. DE courses must adhere to both sets of standards.

## 4.0 Academic Responsibilities for Distance Education

### 4.1 Students

All new and continuing College of Charleston students are eligible for enrollment in DE courses for which course prerequisites have been met.<sup>3</sup> Each student, whether degree- or non-degree seeking, must meet the admission requirements for the College of Charleston and the approved prerequisites for the specific DE course. Students enrolled in DE courses are expected to have mastered the learning outcomes for the applicable prerequisite courses.

DE students are also governed by the College of Charleston *Student Handbook*, the *College of Charleston Undergraduate Catalog*, the *Graduate Catalog*, and all other student regulations at the College of Charleston (e.g., Honor Code, Code of Conduct). See the

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<sup>2</sup> See the SACSCOC Policy Statement at <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/DistanceCorrespondenceEducation.pdf>, as last updated during July 2014.

<sup>3</sup> State Authorization restrictions may apply in certain cases.

College of Charleston *Student Handbook* at College Policy 13.1 on the policy website (policy.cofc.edu).

#### **4.2 Faculty**

Faculty who teach a class online must first complete the College's DE Readiness and Orientation course. Exceptions to this requirement must be approved in writing by the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (hereafter, "Provost") and with the recommendation of the relevant Dean.

A synchronous, three-credit-hour lecture class should meet for at least 2,100 minutes, just as a face-to-face class would meet. Additional information about the meaning of credit hours at the College of Charleston is available at College Policy 12.1.5, "Assignment of Credit Hours," published at policy.cofc.edu.

An asynchronous class must be sustained long enough for the students to complete the course in a reasonable amount of time. The course must adhere to the same standards of quality found in the traditional classroom and must result in collegiate-level learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the course (or to comparable courses) offered in a face-to-face setting.

Non-credit courses may carry time requirements, consistent with any applicable divisional or school policy and subject to the review and determination of the relevant Dean(s) or Provost.

Faculty teaching DE course sections must comply with all applicable College policies, including those concerning information security and the protection of student privacy.

#### **4.3 Department Chairs and Program Directors**

Department Chairs and Program Directors must approve the offering of DE course sections in the relevant unit. Chairs and Directors are responsible for ensuring that the online courses are clearly designated in all applicable software systems as online or other DE courses, in consultation with the Registrar.

#### **4.4 Academic Deans**

Academic Deans have oversight over DE courses taught in their schools, in consultation with the relevant Programs Directors, Department Chairs, and other Deans (e.g., Dean of the School of Professional Studies, Dean of the Honors College, Graduate Dean).

#### **4.5 Director of Maymester/Summer Sessions**

The Director of Maymester/Summer Sessions is responsible for enforcing the Summer School guidelines as they pertain to online and other DE courses.

#### **4.6 Faculty Coordinator for eLearning and Distance Education**

The Faculty Coordinator is responsible for enforcing Fall and Spring guidelines for online and other DE courses and works closely with the Director of Maymester/Summer

Sessions for summer courses.

#### **4.7 Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs**

The Provost is the final authority in setting academic policy and resolving academic disagreements concerning online and other DE courses. Certain matters of institutional policy may require consultation by the Provost with the General Counsel and/or the President of the College.

The Provost and all other academic administrators should be attentive to the relationship between expanded DE course offerings and College Policy 7.6.8, “Substantive Change.”

### **5.0 Responsibilities for Distance Education Technology and Preparation**

#### **5.1 Student Expectations**

As a condition of enrollment, students are expected to meet minimum proficiency requirements and possess a knowledge of DE course requirements, including operation of appropriate technology equipment (i.e., not merely a smartphone) and required technical skills. The student readiness survey is used to assess these competencies.

To enhance success in DE courses, students must demonstrate minimum competencies for effectively using technology tools and applications presented by faculty to access resource materials, to actively interact with faculty and other students and to produce required assignments.

#### **5.2 Faculty and Instructional Strategies**

Instructional strategies for DE are quite different from those strategies recommended by more traditional teaching models. Faculty colleagues who teach DE courses are expected to have a working knowledge of DE and the ability to design appropriate strategies and implement effective DE practices.

Faculty colleagues are expected to identify measurable learning outcomes and objectives that meet the goals of the DE course, consistent with the course description and learning outcomes approved by the Faculty Senate, and with the other professional responsibilities of the faculty. Faculty should also assure that the quality and quantity of student interaction with the professor and other students is comparable to traditional teaching methods. Attention should be given to the personalized faculty/student interactions that are characteristic of the College of Charleston.

#### **5.3 Initial Faculty Training and DE Orientation**

Faculty will attend, as mandated and/or as needed and available (prior summer, fall, and spring semesters), a training/orientation program to achieve mastery of selected technology tools that correspond to instructional outcomes and goals expressed in the needs assessment. Depending on funding, the following will be provided.

A \$500 stipend (or such other stipend as is approved by the Provost) will be paid for

participation in the required DE Readiness and Orientation course. Recommended topics include identification of teaching behaviors and learner outcomes, teaching selected technology tools that match desired instructional behaviors/outcomes, and comprehensive application of technology tools for specific DE courses. Individual or small group in-service sessions will also be provided for specialized/infrequent tool requests. These sessions will be offered during the semesters prior to the DE course being taught.

A technology needs assessment will match a faculty member's teaching objectives, goals, activities with technology tools/applications that can be supported by the College. Faculty will describe teaching objectives and corresponding student behaviors appropriate to the content and level of the course. Based on the results of the assessment, the DE Readiness instructor will recommend appropriate technology tools/applications that support the best practices of DE. Faculty are permitted to use other technologies, provided they do not require Division of Information Technology (hereafter, "IT") support or infrastructure beyond the scope of College IT standards, pose a risk to the network, or create the risk of a security breach for sensitive college data. Faculty electing to use technologies not supported by the College or IT assume all responsibility for student support and directed use of such technologies.

#### **5.4 Additional DE Training**

In addition to the DE Readiness and Orientation course, as described above, faculty also may apply for access, contingent on available funding, to financial support for additional DE Training and Course Demonstration activities. In such cases, a stipend may be paid for the demonstration of sound DE design and principles in the preparation of a course as a DE offering.<sup>4</sup>

The DE Training and Course Demonstration stipend is \$1000 (or such other stipend as is approved by the Provost), payable at the completion of both the course preparation and the course quality rubric. A copy of the demonstration syllabus must be shared with the Faculty Coordinator for eLearning and Distance Education, prior to the registration of students in the relevant DE course section. The payment of such stipends is predicated on the prior acceptance of the initial or revised course-demonstration proposal, which shall be reviewed in light of criteria approved by the Provost.

Payment of such stipends also is contingent upon prior completion of the online DE Readiness and Orientation course, as described above. Payments only apply to demonstrations for regular catalog courses that are fully online (no less than 75 percent of class time). Furthermore, payment for any course demonstration involving a special-topics DE course is generally limited to one such payment per faculty member.

All demonstration stipends are intended to support the creation of specific course-level content resulting in actual course offerings, consistent with the College's faculty training

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<sup>4</sup> The stipend in this case is not paid for the development of Teaching Material, but for the development of specific faculty competencies related to DE instruction.

goals and irrespective of course renumbering, renaming, or reconstitution. Such demonstration stipends, as described in this section, are an inducement to participation in faculty training and the development of certain faculty skills and do not create a work-for-hire relationship, unless the faculty colleague and the College agree in advance and in writing to such a relationship. However, as indicated in College Policy 9.1.13, ownership of all syllabi resides with the College.

### **5.5 Protection of Student Privacy**

Faculty teaching DE courses are expected to protect student privacy. Specifically, faculty teaching such courses are expected (a) to use OAKS, the College's learning management system, to ensure security of student work and grades; (b) to use OAKS or the College's email system for all confidential communications (e.g., sharing of grade information); (c) to keep student work and grades confidential; (d) to keep passwords secure; and (e) to follow all applicable FERPA policies and procedures (see 7.4 below).

All College policies addressing student privacy and institutional security apply to DE courses. Faculty teaching DE course sections are expected to comply with these policies.

## **6.0 Class Size, Enrollment, and Faculty Compensation**

Subject to the review and determination of the Provost and/or the relevant Dean, Department Chairs (or Program Directors) approve the scheduling of online and other DE course sections and bear responsibility for understanding all DE Policies and for proper coding of course sections.

Online courses are assumed to be wholly asynchronous unless specifically listed by the Registrar with dates and times for synchronous elements (e.g., live guest speakers, live group exams/presentations).

### **6.1 Course Conflicts**

Online and other DE instructors may not use the syllabus to introduce assignments that potentially create conflicts with face-to-face courses. Unavoidable conflicts are always settled in favor of the face-to-face course, via make-up exams and alternative assignments.

### **6.2 Online Enrollment Limits**

Enrollments in an undergraduate online course taught by an instructor for the first time will typically be held to approximately 20; enrollments in graduate online courses may be lower. Typically, with subsequent offerings of this course by the same instructor, the maximum enrollment in Fall and Spring semesters will increase to that normally set for face-to-face sections of the same course. A department or program whose faculty believes that online delivery requires lower-than-normal enrollments for one or more courses should propose a plan to the relevant Dean for accommodating the enrollment caps for those courses within the overall instructional load.

## **7.0 Legal and Policy Issues**

Like traditional, face-to-face classes, online and other DE courses also must be designed and delivered in accordance with certain legal and policy constraints and obligations. All web addresses listed below are subject to change.

### **7.1 TEACH Act and Use of Copyrighted Material**

For specific information regarding the TEACH Act and Fair Use of copyrighted materials, seek out materials involving copyright guidelines at the relevant College of Charleston website. Those guidelines currently are housed at

<http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/content.php&pid=36640&sid=272298>

<http://www.cofc.edu/library/faculty/index.php>

### **7.2 Disability Services**

For answers to specific questions, contact the Center for Disability Services (3-1431 or [SNAP@cofc.edu](mailto:SNAP@cofc.edu)) or see [www.cofc.edu/~cgs/responsibilities.htm](http://www.cofc.edu/~cgs/responsibilities.htm).

### **7.3 Intellectual Property Rights**

The College does not claim ownership of online or digital course content when the development of that content does not make substantial use of College resources and facilities or the receipt of a stipend for the development of DE Teaching Material. The controlling authority on this topic is College Policy 9.1.13, "Intellectual Property Policy," available at [policy.cofc.edu](http://policy.cofc.edu). College Policy 9.1.13 includes specific information about DE Teaching Material and other topics of relevant to DE.

The College reserves the right to use online or digital course content for up to one year after the instructor of a DE course leaves the College.

### **7.4 Privacy and FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974)**

The College is committed to protecting the privacy of students enrolled in DE courses. Specifically, FERPA applies to all students, without regard to the mode of delivery for the courses in which they are enrolled. For details on FERPA, see

<http://www.registrar.cofc.edu/ferpa> or contact the Office of the Registrar by phone at 843.953.5668 or by email at [registrar@cofc.edu](mailto:registrar@cofc.edu).

### **7.5 Final Authority on Legal Issues**

The College of Charleston Office of Legal Affairs is the final authority on legal issues germane to the subject matter of this Policy.

## **8.0 Policy Manager and Responsible Department or Office**

Provost (or Provost's Designee), Office of the Provost

## 9.0 Departments/Offices Affected by this Policy

Office of the Provost  
Office of the Academic Experience  
Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning  
Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Information Management  
Office of the Registrar  
Division of Information Technology  
All Deans, Departments, and Academic Programs

## 10.0 Procedures Related to this Policy

None.

## 11.0 Related Policies, Documents or Forms

*Faculty/Administration Manual*  
Policy 7.6.8, "Substantive Change"  
Policy 7.6.10, "Policy on Course Syllabi"  
Policy 9.1.13, "Intellectual Property Policy"  
Policy 10.18, "Website Privacy Policy"  
Policy 11.1, "Privacy Policy and Procedure"  
Policy 12.1.5, "Assignment of Credit Hours"  
Policy 12.5.2.2, "Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act"  
Divisional Policy on Instructors of Record and Faculty Credentials

## 12.0 Review Schedule

*Approved:* July 2016  
*Next Review Date:* October 1, 2021