**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to describe the principles and processes designed to ensure quality in distance education at Creighton University and to establish distance education as an effective method for extending educational opportunities within Creighton's mission as a Catholic, Jesuit University committed to excellence.

**POLICY**

**Mission:** Institutional decisions made to offer distance courses or programs must explain how offering the distance courses or programs is consistent with the mission of the University and clearly identify the populations being served by the distance educational offerings. Significant differences in populations served by distance programming and those served by the face-to-face courses and programs must be supported by a documented, intentional academic plan to reach different populations.

**Organizational Structures:**

The Distance Education Executive Committee membership is appointed by the Provost to guide the work of the Center for Academic Innovation (CAI) and is charged with:

- Articulating and defining the vision for distance education at Creighton
- Providing leadership for coordination of support for distance programming
- Developing policies and procedures, and establishing distance education goals to advance the University’s distance education programming.

The Distance Education Executive Committee membership shall consist of:

- Lead administrator for CAI (chair)
- 2 Directors of distance education programs
- Dean of the Graduate School and College of Professional Studies
- Lead administrator from the Office of Assessment
- Representation from the Office of Finance
- Representation from Marketing and Communications
- Representation from Enrollment Management
- Representation from DoIT
The Distance Education Advisory Council includes representatives of each school or college, areas directly involved in supporting distance students, and student representatives. The Council will be advisory to the Distance Education Executive Committee. The Council will:

- Represent students, faculty members, and support units in matters pertaining to distance education and technology integration by bringing forth issues, concerns, and questions to members of the Distance Education Executive Committee.
- Provide information (i.e., fact gathering, surveys) as necessary to assess distance education growth and quality.
- Participate on sub-groups when certain projects/topics need to be explored.

The University is accountable to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the public for evidence of quality in distance education programming. The CAI is established as the University’s central organizing and reporting agency for evidence of quality in distance education. The CAI, Distance Education Executive Committee and Advisory Council, in conjunction with academic administrators, are therefore responsible for establishing procedures to evaluate quality of distance education programming at the University.

**INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**

**Academic Planning:** Documented strategic planning for distance programs and courses must include evidence of market viability for the program, targets for enrollment, academic and student services, course development, faculty support, infrastructure and sustainability. In addition to other requirements and procedures in place for on-ground courses and programs, before schools and colleges begin to develop distance education programs or courses they must consult with the CAI. The CAI must be notified of all face-to-face programs or courses that are revised such that they become distance programs or courses and must subsequently comply with all aspects of this policy.

The University’s Approval of a new Academic Program policy (4.1.4) will be used to review new distance program proposals.

Proposals to translate an existing face-to-face program to a distance education format will be reviewed by the Distance Education Executive Committee. The Committee has final approval authority for proposals to translate an existing face-to-face program to a distance education format. Proposals must use the New Distance Education Program: Translation of On-Ground proposal template and be submitted to CAI no later than 6 months prior to the proposed program initiation date. The purpose of this review is to ensure that the program is meeting the quality standards set forth for distance education.

CAI is available to assist with proposal development for both new and translated programs and will work with the unit developing the proposal to conduct a preliminary review of the proposal to help streamline passage of the proposal.
Technology Infrastructure: The University must provide reliable and sustainable technology infrastructure and support needed to deliver distance education. A documented technology plan that includes electronic security measures (i.e., password protection, encryption, back-up systems), plans for maintaining and upgrading the technology infrastructure that supports distance education must be in place and operational.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Curricula and Course Development: Procedures for approval of distance education curricula must be the same as those for curricula offered face-to-face. Oversight of the curricula for distance courses or programs is the responsibility of the faculty within the academic unit offering distance courses or programs. Distance programs must have a schedule of course offerings available to students allowing them to plan their academic program of study. A course development schedule for distance programs must be in place to ensure distance courses are ready to be offered in alignment with the published program of study. Learning goals for distance education programs must be defined and be publicly available.

Course Design: The design of distance courses must align with the University’s established best practices for distance course design as defined in the Online Course Design Rubric located on the CAI web site. Course design review will be conducted by the CAI for all new distance courses. Course design review using the University Online Course Design Rubric will be conducted every five years for existing distance courses.

Student Identity Verification: Distance courses and programs must employ the University’s established processes for verification of distance student identity. Student identity verification requirements are established to assure compliance with regulations promulgated by the HCL. Pursuant to the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and subsequent HLC regulations, each distance student is issued a unique username and password. These credentials are used to access distance course content and assessments of learning. Initial verification of student identity occurs during the program admission processes.

Given the dynamic nature of student verification regulations, the Student Identity Verification portion of this policy will be reviewed annually and modified if needed.

Distance students must be made aware of and held accountable to the same academic integrity standards as on-campus Creighton students. These standards are articulated in the Code of Conduct and the Academic Honesty Policy from the Creighton University Student Handbook and the relevant University Bulletin. Exams that are not open book must either be timed such that in order to successfully complete the exam students would not have time to use reference materials to obtain answers, or employ a proctor using a testing center or other proctoring arrangement approved by the academic program. Faculty will apply the same or similar techniques to detect academic dishonesty for distance and on-campus students.
Faculty Support: Faculty support resources are coordinated by the CAI, which serves as a central resource for all Creighton faculty members teaching distance courses or in distance programs. Developmental activities to prepare and support all faculty members and instructors (full-time, part-time, adjunct, contributed service, etc.) for teaching distance courses or programs (including teaching, learning, technology, assessment practices and the incorporation of these practices into courses) must be routinely available and all faculty members are encouraged to use them. Instructional design and technical assistance in distance course development, delivery, and revision must be available to all faculty members teaching distance courses. Faculty members developing new distance education courses or making significant revisions to existing distance education courses will work with an instructional designer throughout the development process.

Distance Teaching Preparation: All faculty members new to teaching distance courses for Creighton University must successfully complete the Creighton University certification for distance teaching and learning. All faculty members teaching distance courses must demonstrate distance teaching competencies. The evidence required to demonstrate achievement of the competencies is determined by the Distance Education Executive Board.

STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

Prospective Students: Prospective students of a distance program must be provided self-assessment opportunities to determine their skills and aptitude for distance learning. Prospective students must also be provided a description of technology requirements, distance or technology fees, exam proctoring requirements, equipment needed, onsite visits required, contact information for an advisor, and overview of the structure of a distance course.

Access to Student Services: Distance students will have adequate access to the range of services appropriate to support the programs offered through distance education. Technical support for distance students must be available from a distance, and a means of communicating emergency and planned outages that will affect distance students must be in place. The CAI serves as the point of contact for distance students needing assistance in securing access to support services for students. Feedback mechanisms must be regularly employed to assess effectiveness of all support systems for distance students.

Orientation: Orientation to support services for distance students, including access to and training for the library resources, must be provided to all distance students.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Assessment Plans: All distance programs must have assessment plans that are congruent with the program learning goals and align with the Creighton University policies on assessment and/or program review.
**Policies and Procedures**

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**POLICY:**

**Quality in Distance Education Policy**

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**Parity of Distance and On-Campus Courses and Programs:** To ensure similarity of outcomes of programs taught using different delivery methods, programs taught in the traditional face-to-face format and in the distance format must be reviewed annually by the academic unit offering the program using the University defined parity metrics. The outcomes of such review will be reported annually to the CAI.

**Assessment of Program Quality:** Each academic program is responsible for assessment of program quality including periodic review and updating of distance course materials. The course materials review schedule is defined by the academic unit offering the distance program. The University’s standard set of course evaluation questions for distance courses must be integrated into distance course evaluation tools used by the academic unit offering the distance courses or program.

The CAI will collect assessment data annually from distance program directors or course instructor of record and will then generate an annual report of distance programming quality. The report will be submitted to the University Assessment Committee and the Office of the Provost.

**SCOPE**

This policy applies to all University distance education courses and programs as defined in the DEFINITIONS section of this policy.

**ADMINISTRATION AND INTERPRETATION**

This policy is administered by the Office of Provost. Questions regarding this policy should be referred to this office.

**DEFINITIONS**

This policy employs the Higher Learning Commission’s definition for distance programs and courses. Distance-delivered *programs* are those certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered courses. A program is defined as a distance delivered program if a student may matriculate through a program by taking 50 percent or more of the required course work is a distance education format. In other words, if the program includes a number of required courses offered at in a distance education format and a student may choose to take the distance required courses as part of her/his program of study, and by doing so s/he earns 50 percent or more of the program’s required credits in the distance education format, then the program is identified as a distance delivered program.

Distance education *courses* as those in which all or the vast majority (75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other. The academic unit sponsoring the course or program will use the HLC definitions to determine if a program or course falls within the purview of this policy.
For the purposes of this policy the term ‘faculty member’ includes all individuals performing instructional activities in a course.

**AMENDMENTS OR TERMINATION OF THIS POLICY**

The University reserves the right to modify, amend, or terminate this policy at any time. The policy is not a contract between Creighton University and its employees.