

# ***Policies and Procedures***

<i>SECTION:</i> <b>Academic Concerns</b>	<i>NO.</i> <b>4.1.2.</b>			
<i>CHAPTER:</i> <b>General</b>	<i>ISSUED:</i> 1/10/00	<i>REV. A</i> 12/15/04	<i>REV. B</i> 12/21/11	<i>REV. C</i> 7/11/12
<i>POLICY:</i> <b>Quality in Distance Education Policy</b>	<i>REV. D</i> 6/19/13	<i>REV. E</i> 3/4/19		
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## **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 Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) supports excellence in learning and innovative pedagogy. The Center combines three areas of excellence; eLearning, faculty development, and institutional effectiveness within one unit to serve the University for academic growth, instructional design and faculty/staff professional growth in the Jesuit tradition while following best practices for assessment and quality control.

The Distance Program Administrator Committee (DPAC) develops and promotes practices that contribute to the quality and growth of distance education at Creighton University. The Committee represents students, faculty, and support units in matters pertaining to distance education and technology integration by bringing forth issues, concerns, questions and ideas for innovation.

The Academic Planning Review Committee (APRC) is a university-wide committee responsible for formulating and recommending academic planning goals and initiatives for the University. Specifically, the committee recommends actions and procedures for new and existing academic programs and recommends changes in programs, as well as the elimination of programs. This committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Provost and Council of Deans in academic planning for the University.

The TLC is the University's central organizing and reporting office for evidence of quality in distance education. The University is accountable to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the public for evidence of quality in distance education programming. The TLC, in conjunction with academic administrators and the DPAC, is responsible for establishing procedures to evaluate quality of distance education programming at the University.

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## **INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**

The DPAC includes representatives of each school or college, as well as areas directly involved in supporting distance students. The Committee will:

- Represent students, faculty, and support units in matters pertaining to distance education and technology integration by bringing forth issues, concerns, questions and innovation ideas.
- 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.

**Academic Planning Review Committee:** The University’s Approval of a new Academic Program Policy (4.1.4) will be used to review new distance program proposals by the APRC. Documented strategic planning for distance programs and courses include the following evidence: 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, schools and programs must:

- Consult with the Academic Planning Review Committee before developing distance education programs.
- Notify the Academic Planning Committee and the Registrar’s Office of face to face courses revised to online formats.
- Seek approval for online courses with TLC distance reviewers to ensure alignment with national quality standards.

Proposals to provision an existing face-to-face program to a distance/hybrid education format will be reviewed by the APRC. The New Distance Education Program Provisioning of On-Ground Proposal template is followed for the proposal and submitted to the APRC six months prior to the proposed program initiation date. The purpose of this review is to ensure that the program meets the quality standards set forth for distance/hybrid education. The APRC has final approval authority for proposals to provision an existing face-to-face program to a distance/hybrid education format.

Academic Planning Review Committee and TLC are available to assist with proposal development for both new and current programs and will work with the unit developing the proposal to conduct a preliminary review of the proposal to help streamline approval.

**Technology Infrastructure:** The University provides 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 is in place and operational.

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### **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

**Curricula and Course Development:** Procedures for approval of distance education curricula are the same as those for curricula offered face-to-face within the same school/college. 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 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 is available to ensure distance courses are ready to be offered in alignment with the published program of study. Learning goals for distance education programs are defined and publicly available.

**Course Design:** The design of distance courses align with the University's established best practices for distance course design as defined in the Online Course Design Rubric. Course design review will be conducted by the TLC 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 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 HLC. 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 by the Distance Program Administrator Committee and modified if needed.

**Academic Integrity:** Distance students are oriented 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 Catalog. Faculty apply the same or similar techniques to detect academic dishonesty for distance and on-campus students.

### **FACULTY SUPPORT**

**Faculty Support:** Faculty support resources are coordinated by the TLC, 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) are available and faculty members are encouraged to use them. Instructional design and technical assistance in distance course development, delivery, and revision are available to 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.

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**Distance Teaching Preparation:** Faculty members teaching distance courses are required to demonstrate distance teaching competencies. The evidence required to demonstrate achievement of the competencies is determined by either the Program Director or authorized supervisor, or by successful completion of Creighton University’s course for distance teaching and learning.

## **STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES**

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

**Access to Student Services:** Distance students are provided adequate access to the range of services appropriate to support the programs offered through distance education. Technical support for distance students are available and a means of communicating emergency and planned outages that affect distance students is in place. Each academic unit provides the point of contact for distance students needing assistance in securing support services. Effectiveness of support systems for distance students is included in the course evaluation system. Access to additional student services for online students as well as policies, procedures, services, and resources are listed in the Creighton University Student Handbook.

**Orientation:** Orientation to academic technologies and support services for distance students, including access to and training for the library resources, are provided.

## **EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

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

**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 are reviewed and reported annually by the TLC in conjunction with the academic unit offering the program. University defined parity metrics will be used to complete the review.

**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 has been integrated into distance course evaluation tools used by the academic unit offering the distance courses or program. The TLC will collect responses from the course evaluation questions, aggregate them by program and will generate an annual report of distance programming quality.

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## **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 in a distance education format. In other words, if the program includes a number of required courses offered 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* are 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.