



# University Policy for Distance Education

**Version:** 1.0

**Responsible University Official:** Provost

**Effective Date:** May 23, 2018

## 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide institution-level standards and definitions for distance education to ensure the academic quality for which SLU is known is maintained throughout our distance education programs and courses, and to address regulatory compliance.

## 2.0 Scope

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

## 3.0 Definitions

This policy employs the Higher Learning Commission's definitions for distance education, distance programs and distance courses.

**Distance Education:** Distance education is education that uses one or more of the [following] technologies (i) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and (ii) to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies used may include: (i) the internet; (ii) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; (iii) audio conferencing; or (iv) videocassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the video cassettes, DVDs or CD-ROMs are used in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in clauses (i) through (iii).

**Distance-delivered Programs:** 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-delivered Courses: Distance-delivered *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; the terms 'distance programs' and 'distance-delivered programs' are used interchangeably; the terms 'distance courses' and 'distance-delivered courses' are used interchangeably.

#### **4.0 University Standards for Distance Education**

To ensure quality, Saint Louis University commits to the following standards for all Distance Education programs and courses. The standards are based on the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions'(C-RAC) Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education and have been developed specifically with SLU's context and mission in mind.

1. Distance education is appropriate to the University's mission and purposes.
  - a. The University publicly states the value of distance education in support of its Mission.
  - b. As appropriate, the University's distance education programs and courses align with stated institutional goals for the student experience.
  - c. The recruitment and admissions practices supporting distance education programs and courses appropriately target the student populations to be served.
2. The University's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding distance education programs and courses are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.
  - a. The University's strategic planning processes include planning for distance education.
  - b. Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase the number of distance education programs and courses as well as student enrollment in new and existing distance education programs.
  - c. Plans for expanding distance education demonstrate the University's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality.
  - d. The University and its distance education programs regularly evaluate and respond to resource needs and availability.
  - e. The University prepares a multi-year budget for distance education that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, student and academic services, and technology infrastructure.

3. Distance education is incorporated into the University's systems of governance and academic oversight.
  - a. The University faculty have a primary role in the design and implementation of its distance education offerings.
  - b. Approval of distance education programs and courses follows standard processes used in the school/college or university.
  - c. The University ensures the rigor of the distance education programs and courses offerings and the quality of the instruction.
  - d. The University conducts periodic distance education program evaluation for sustainability and alignment with institutional priorities.
  - e. Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the University can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all distance education programs and courses provided under its name.
4. Curricula for the University's distance education programs and courses are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.
  - a. Curricula delivered through distance education are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs if offered in both modalities.
  - b. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses.
  - c. Scheduling of courses for distance education programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees.
  - d. The University or program has established and enforces a policy on faculty-student ratios in distance education courses to support effective student learning.
  - e. Curriculum, course design and delivery supports student-student and faculty-student interaction.
5. The University evaluates the effectiveness of its distance education programs and courses, including the extent to which the distance education goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.
  - a. Assessment of student learning reflects effective practices for distance education.
  - b. Student course evaluations are routinely administered and response analysis contributes to course improvements.
  - c. The University regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in distance education courses and uses the results for improvement.
  - d. The University documents its success in implementing changes informed by assessment and evaluation at the University and program levels.
6. Faculty responsible for delivering the distance education curricula and evaluating students' success in achieving the goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.
  - a. The University provides regular professional development programming for faculty teaching in distance education including best practices in distance education pedagogy, applicable technology tools, and institutional mission.

- b. The University has in place practices to ensure faculty teaching in distance education programs and courses are appropriately prepared to teach in the distance education environment.
  - c. Effective support is available for faculty members in distance education pedagogy and technology use throughout the duration of the course or program.
7. The University provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in distance education programs and courses..
- a. The University's admissions process for distance education programs provides effective web-based information to students about the nature of the distance education environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in distance education.
  - b. Distance education orientation designed for the course or program is provided.
  - c. Support services are provided to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the distance education program or course.
  - d. Students in distance education programs have easy access to effective tech support 24/7.
  - e. Students using distance education have effective access to learning resources appropriate for the program or course, such as library and information resources.
  - f. Student complaint, code of conduct, and appeal processes are clearly defined, accessible, and designed such that distance students are able to engage in the processes effectively from a distance.
  - g. Publications and advertising for distance education programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements including any face-to-face expectations, academic calendar, and on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work).
  - h. Courses, services, and resources used in distance education employ strategies to comply with ADA accessibility regulations per the University Distance Education policies.
8. The University assures the academic integrity of its distance education offerings.
- a. The University has in place effective procedures to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education program or course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. (Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)
  - b. The University and school/college policies on academic integrity are relevant and appropriate for distance education.
  - c. The institution makes clear in writing that the academic integrity processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of program admission and course registration of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. (Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)
  - d. Academic integrity policies and expectations are presented during the orientation for distance students.

- e. Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the authentication process to University's systems.

## 5.0 Approvals

**This policy was:**

1. Approved by CADD: *May 23, 2018*
2. Approved by Provost Nancy Brickhouse: *May 17, 2018*
3. Approved by Distance Education Committee *April 27, 2018*