

# **Saint Francis University**

## **Distance Education Policy Manual**

**A Resource for Instructors**

**Prepared by the Committee on Distance Education**

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# Saint Francis University Distance Education Policy Manual

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## Overview

The Saint Francis University Distance Education Policy Manual is intended as a resource for faculty teaching Distance Education (DE) courses at Saint Francis University (SFU). The purpose of this manual is to:

1. detail policies and procedures specific to DE at SFU;
2. establish standards to meet or exceed DE requirements at the state and federal levels;
3. ensure consistency of delivery of DE across all SFU programs; and
4. provide information about resources and support for DE available at SFU.

This guide was written by the Committee on Distance Education (CDE) and approval by the SFU Faculty Senate. This guide will be reviewed on an annual basis by the CDE, with the most current version published on the DE website, accessible via my.francis.

## Definitions Pertaining to Distance Education

Distance learning or distributed learning is a formal educational process in which some or all of the instruction occurs when the learner and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time; information or distributed learning technology is often the connector between the learner and the instructor or the site of origin. Programs delivered through distance learning modalities...should meet academic and learning support standards, appropriate to the type of delivery, comparable to those offered in more traditional formats within higher education. Student learning objectives and outcomes should be consistent across comparable offerings, regardless of where or how they are provided. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, (c) 2002)

Face-to-face course:	A course in which instruction takes place when the instructor and students are in the same place at the same time.
Web-enhanced course:	A course in which a face-to-face course uses online technology to support access to course materials, activities, and communication tools. In a web-enhanced course, use of the website does not substitute for class attendance. Classes will meet face-to-face in a traditional classroom on a designated day and time.
Hybrid course:	A course in which some face-to-face "seat time" has been replaced by online learning activities.
Online course:	A course in which all or nearly all course activity is conducted online.
Traditional:	Refers to the semester format 14 weeks in length, followed by a final.
Synchronous:	Happening at the same time; in real time.
Asynchronous:	Happening at different times.

Currently, SFU offers DE through fully online and hybrid courses. For the purposes of this document, the term "online" will refer to both fully online and hybrid courses. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.

## **Academic Standards for Distance Education Programs and Courses**

SFU provides quality distance learning opportunities for students in support of the vision, mission, and values of the University. SFU is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and as such, programs offered via DE will meet the standards of that body as well as the standards of any approving and accrediting agencies as required. All courses offered via DE are held to the same rigorous academic standards as traditional courses and are assessed accordingly, with additional standards of design and presentation imposed.

### **Distance Education Programs**

Programs offered through DE will be consistent with the role and mission of SFU and the offering academic units. There will be no distinction between programs offered through DE and those offered through face-to-face instruction. Only courses and programs which have been approved through established institutional procedures will be offered via DE.

Selection of programs to be offered via DE is the purview of the appropriate academic unit. The academic unit will provide oversight of a program that is offered via DE to ensure currency of the program, its courses, and resources. Each program will be coherent and complete and will result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree awarded. As necessary and appropriate, a DE program will be approved by state, regional, or other agencies or associations relevant to the conduct of academic programs at SFU. DE programs will also meet the same requirements as face-to-face programs holding specialized accreditations. Once a program is implemented, the offering academic unit and the university commit to support the continuation of the program for a period sufficient to enable admitted students to complete the program.

### **Distance Education Courses**

Courses delivered via DE will be SFU academic department courses approved through the established SFU curriculum approval process, carrying the same curriculum prerequisites and expected outcomes as traditional face-to-face courses. There will be no distinction in rigor, quality, or standards of excellence between courses offered through DE and those offered face-to-face. All DE courses must meet the same requirements for instructional time as face-to-face courses as defined in the Faculty Handbook Article XII, Section 26, *Definitions of Semester Length, Credit Hour, and Instructional Time Equivalencies*.

Academic departments will retain responsibility for and control over decisions regarding courses originating in their department. The initial decision about whether a department's course is suited for DE delivery lies with the department as does the decision regarding suitability for delivery in a modified semester format (that is, other than the traditional 14-week semester). Before any course is developed for DE delivery in a traditional or modified format, approval from the originating department must be secured and documented. Specific approval for each variation of modified semester format is required. Documentation of approval will be maintained by the CETL. Associated forms and processes will be reviewed by the CDE and updated as needed.

Regardless of the delivery mode of a course, faculty members teaching established departmental courses are to be guided by the departmental outlines set up for these courses. Current syllabi for all courses must be on file in the Office of the Provost and in that of the respective department chairperson. (*SFU Faculty Handbook Section 6. Course Syllabi.*)

When a fully online course is offered in an accelerated format (4-7 weeks), the course must be made available to students in advance of the course's official start date. This provides students with sufficient time to develop familiarity with the online course environment, address technology issues, and complete introductory activities before moving into course content. Each program will determine the exact amount of time needed for early course release, but a minimum of 5 days is preferred. Programs are responsible for informing their faculty and students of their early release policies. Any work time expected of the student during this early release period will contribute to the total credit hours for the course.

### **Faculty Certification to Teach Online Courses**

Any faculty member who wishes to teach online for SFU must be adequately prepared to manage the technical and pedagogical challenges of the format. To ensure that this is so, faculty must be certified based on professional development and experience in online course design and delivery as well as demonstrated competency in using the university course management system and any other technology required of a specific course.

It is incumbent upon the department chair to refer potential online instructors to the CETL to discuss certification at SFU. Upon certification, the instructor will be added to the list of instructors who are eligible to teach online. Documentation of certification will be maintained by the CETL. Associated forms will be reviewed by the CDE and updated as needed.

Regardless of delivery mechanism, academic departments will retain control of faculty selection for their courses based on content expertise, academic credentials, and any other criteria set forth by the department. Therefore, in addition to becoming certified to teach online at SFU, an instructor must also receive approval to teach a specific course from the department in which that course originates.

### **Online Course Development and Review**

Developing a quality online course requires a significant amount of time to plan curriculum, organize course structure, and create content and engaging activities. Development of a new online course should begin at least 18 weeks prior to the official course start date and should be guided by the "*SFU Best Practices Guide for Online Course Design and Delivery.*" CETL personnel are available for instructional design and technological assistance throughout the development process. Online instructors are strongly encouraged to initiate contact with the CETL as early in the development process as possible.

To ensure that online courses meet the quality standards for design and delivery cited above, each will be reviewed by a three-member panel of selected CDE members and CETL personnel. Instructors will be contacted by the CDE regarding the review schedule. (Exception: Courses which are specific to a fully online program and which have been developed in close partnership with an assigned instructional designer may be exempt from this review process at the discretion of the CETL Director.) Documentation of course review/certification will be maintained by the CETL. Associated forms and processes will be reviewed by the CDE and updated as needed.

### **Faculty Evaluations**

Faculty members teaching distance education courses will be evaluated using established SFU procedures and instruments. Faculty who teach distance education courses are required to use the electronic Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) system as outlined in Article III of the SFU Faculty Handbook. Faculty who teach online courses are strongly encouraged to use the IDEA system in all of their online courses, even if not required to do so by the Faculty Handbook.

Student access to the appropriate form will be provided via a weblink in the course site no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled end date of the course. It is the instructor's responsibility to provide this access, accompanied by a statement explaining the purpose of the evaluation and how the results will be used, and to strongly encourage students to participate in the evaluation process.

The CETL provides instruction in the use and administration of online faculty evaluations at the request of the department chair and/or instructor. CETL staff members are also available for consultation to interpret and address results.

### **Course Evaluations**

In order to help guide continuous improvement in online course design and delivery, students will be invited to provide feedback via a standard set of questions provided by the CETL. . Items will address effectiveness and efficiency of delivery systems, course site organization, course communication mechanisms, access to academic resources and student services. Additional items may be developed as deemed appropriate by the course instructor.

Records and analyses of the course evaluations will be maintained by the CETL and used to inform the course review and faculty development processes. Associated forms and processes will be reviewed by the CDE and updated as needed.

### **Course Enrollments**

A high level of student-instructor interaction is essential for quality online courses. Appropriate enrollment caps in online courses should be based on pedagogical considerations and negotiated between instructors and administrators within the academic units, just as they are for traditional courses. If uncertain, the following initial enrollment caps maybe used as a guide, with the understanding that enrollment caps may be adjusted for subsequent offerings of a specific course.

- Non-accelerated (10-15-week) undergraduate courses is 25-30
- Accelerated (4-7 week) undergraduate courses is 20-25
- Accelerated (4-7 week) graduate courses is 15-20

## **Copyright Compliance**

Interpretation and application of U.S. Copyright Law as it applies to distance education remains ambiguous. In many cases, what is considered fair use in the traditional classroom is considered copyright infringement when delivered online. Instructors developing and teaching online courses agree not to include third-party copyrighted material unless appropriate approval (in writing) is provided, or royalty fees were paid for such materials.

The CETL, in collaboration with Information Services Librarians, will work with faculty developing online courses to determine fair use of materials. Instructors are also encouraged to review the Copyright Clearance Center's Campus Guide to Copyright Compliance available at <http://www.copyright.com/Services/copyrightoncampus/basics/index.html>.

## **Intellectual Property**

Saint Francis University supports the development, production, and dissemination of intellectual property by its faculty members. Material created for ordinary teaching use in the classroom and in department programs, such as presentations, syllabi, assignments, and tests will remain the property of the faculty author, but the institution will be permitted to use such material for internal instructional, educational, and administrative purposes, including satisfying requests of accreditation agencies for faculty-authored syllabi and course descriptions.

In an agreement transferring copyright for such works to a publisher, faculty authors are urged to seek to provide rights for the institution to use such works for internal instructional, educational, and administrative purposes. (*Committee on Resources Policy: Ownership of Intellectual Property – approved 6/8/2010*)

## **Online Course Delivery System**

DE will be delivered using the official university course management system, Blackboard Learn. The rationale for using one system is to provide a familiar and consistent environment for students taking online courses, for instructors who are developing them, and for those who support the instructors and students. Instructors can link to other online resources, including textbook sites, from within a Blackboard course site.

Blackboard is maintained and supported through the CETL in conjunction with IT services and is accessible via a link on the My.Francis portal at <https://my.francis.edu> or by direct address at <https://courses.francis.edu>. An SFU username and password are needed to access Blackboard. This is provided to instructors and students by IT Services. Account inquiries can be made through [BBSupport@francis.edu](mailto:BBSupport@francis.edu).

The CETL offers faculty training and support for Blackboard through the following:

- Face-to-face and online workshops for instructors
- Drop-in, phone, and e-mail
- Blackboard Users Group site on the Blackboard server
- Bi-monthly CETL Newsletter
- Student support link, <http://libguides.francis.edu/blackboard>, also found on the Blackboard login page

The CETL maintains a Blackboard Orientation Course to help students become familiar with the system and its tools. Students will automatically be enrolled in the course upon being admitted to the University. This self-paced and optional orientation will introduce the student to the Blackboard interface and provide information about and practice with common tools used in the online course environment. The student will have access to the course for the duration of their enrollment in the university.

For information regarding Blackboard training and support, please contact:

The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning  
Theresa L. Wilson, Director  
Coordinator of Distance Education  
110 Library and Learning Commons  
[twilson@francis.edu](mailto:twilson@francis.edu) (814) 472-2799

### **Support for Distance Education**

Distance Education at SFU is supported through the combined efforts of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), Information Technology Services (ITS), and specific departments and programs offering online courses.

### **Library Resources and Support**

In order to meet the research and information needs of its distance education faculty and students, the SFU Library and Learning Commons provides patrons with access to its electronic resources, course reserves, reference assistance, and other library services via its website at <http://library.francis.edu>. Arrangements for creation of course specific library resources and instructional services such as information literacy training can be made by contacting Library Services.

For assistance with library services and resources, please contact:

Ms. Janie Rager  
Associate Dean of Library Services  
Librarian for Instructional and Information Services  
127 Library and Learning Commons  
[jrager@francis.edu](mailto:jrager@francis.edu) (814) 472-3162

## **Accessibility Services**

To be in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, all programs, services, and activities offered by SFU must be accessible to and usable by persons with documented disabilities who have met the technical and academic standards for admission. The DE program supports the university's commitment to ensuring an equitable academic experience for students with disabilities and will be responsive to requests for reasonable accommodations, regardless of the type of instructional delivery system being utilized. Online courses are required to be ADA compliant.

For assistance with issues regarding accessibility and learning accommodations, please contact:

Ms. April Fry  
Academic Support and Accessibility Services Coordinator  
Center for Academic Success  
111 Francis Hall  
[afry@francis.edu](mailto:afry@francis.edu)  
(814) 472-3176

## References

The following resources were consulted during the writing of this manual:

*Bowling Green State University Online and Blended Course Development Checklist*. Available at: [http://cobl.bgsu.edu/Forms/COBL%20Forms/BGSU\\_OnlineBlendedCrseDevChcklst.pdf](http://cobl.bgsu.edu/Forms/COBL%20Forms/BGSU_OnlineBlendedCrseDevChcklst.pdf).

*Blackboard Exemplary Course Rubric 2012 Version*. Available at: <http://www.blackboard.com/getdoc/7deaf501-4674-41b9-b2f2-554441ba099b/2012-Blackboard-Exemplary-Course-Rubric.aspx>.

*COLTT HOP: Requirements to Teach Online*. Available online by search.

*Copyright Clearance Center's Campus Guide to Copyright Compliance*. Available at <http://www.copyright.com/Services/copyrighoncampus/basics/index.html>.

Commission on Regulation of Postsecondary Distance Education, *Advancing Access through Regulatory Reform: Findings, Principles, and Recommendations for the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)*. Available at: <http://www.sheeo.org/sites/default/files/publications/Commission%20on%20Regulation%20of%20Postsecondary%20Distance%20Education%20Draft%20Recommendations%20FINAL%20April%200.pdf>.

*Middle States' Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)*. Available at: <http://www.msche.org/publications/Guidelines-for-the-Evaluation-of-Distance-Education-Programs.pdf>.

Quality Matters™ Rubric Standards 2011-2013 edition. Available at: [http://www.qmprogram.org/files/QM\\_Standards\\_2011-2013.pdf](http://www.qmprogram.org/files/QM_Standards_2011-2013.pdf).

*Saint Francis University Adult Degree and Continuing Studies Faculty Handbook*. Available at: <http://cms2012.francis.edu/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=48118>.

Saint Francis University Committee on Resources Policy: *Ownership of Intellectual Property* 2010.

*Saint Francis University Faculty Handbook*. Available at: <http://cms2012.francis.edu/assets/0/3088/8445ccb9-e59d-4061-b61f-606a98522fb4.pdf>

Sederberg, L.J. (2003). *Rubric for Online Instruction*. Chico, CA: California State University, Chico. Available at: <http://www.csuchico.edu/tlp/resources/rubric/rubric.pdf>.

*Southern Oregon University Distance Education Handbook*. Available at: <http://www.sou.edu/distancelearning/pdf/DE-Handbook.pdf>.