



Distance Learning Policy 1600-0907

- I. Institutional Policy and Issues
- II. Curriculum and Instruction
- III. Faculty
- IV. Student Support Services
- V. Distance Learning Facilities and support Services
- VI. Planning and Evaluation

Athens State University Distance Learning Policy

I. Institutional Policy and Issues

A Purpose:

The purpose of Athens State University Distance Learning Policy is to assure high quality in the delivery of distance learning with regard to instruction and procedures. This policy is developed in accordance with the authority granted to the President of Athens State University by the State Board of Education and the Chancellor of the Alabama College System. Athens State University approaches its distance learning activities with the recognition of its mission to assist students of the Alabama College System in the timely achievement of their professional and career goals.

B. Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs:

Distance learning activities comply with the SACS “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs,” as well as standards set forth by accrediting bodies The Association for Collegiate Business School Programs (ACBSP) and The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The courses that are offered via distance learning meet the same quality standards as those that apply to campus-based instruction. Elements of single courses or programs are designed to address the specific needs of distance learners who are likely to enroll.

C. Definition:

For purposes of this policy, distance learning is defined as instruction delivered via (1) the Internet on Blackboard® (asynchronous and synchronous), (2) interactive teleconferencing, (3) audio/video media, and (4) emerging technologies.

D. Review of Distance Learning Policy:

The responsibility for evaluating and revising the Distance Learning Policy resides with the University Distance Learning Policy Committee (UDLPC), formerly called the Distance Learning Task Force, which is composed of faculty members from each college, administrators from each college, and various university administrative areas. This committee reports to the President.

II. Curriculum and Instruction:

A. Academic Integrity of Distance Learning Courses:

Distance learning courses are comparable to campus-based courses in terms of: (1) syllabi, (2) textbooks, (3) grading, (4) methods of evaluation, and (5) expected learning outcomes. Distance learning courses are subject to the same policies as stated in the University catalog for campus-based courses.

B. Oversight of Courses:

Like all academic activities, distance learning at Athens State University operates under the purview of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The University Curriculum Committee (UCC), which is made up of faculty from each college, reviews all courses to be offered at Athens State University. Athens State University adheres

to the policy that all courses of the same prefix and number are equivalent, regardless of mode of delivery.

The process for approval of courses for distance learning is as follows: When a faculty member desires to offer a new course, a Distance Learning Approval Form must be submitted to the Dean (see Appendix A). The Dean will call a meeting of the College's Distance Learning Committee (DLC), which is composed of faculty from that college. Along with the Dean, the Distance Learning Committee will review the proposed distance learning courses to ensure that all standards are met, as set forth in this policy. Upon recommendation of the committee, the Dean may return the proposal to the professor(s)/departments for required changes, as appropriate to meet requirements established by this policy, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and other accrediting bodies (NCATE, ACBSP, etc.). If approved as originally proposed or as revised, the Distance Learning Committee will forward the proposal to the College Dean for approval. Upon approval of the College Dean, the proposal will be sent to the University Curriculum Committee for approval to ensure appropriateness to the University's mission. This committee will forward its recommendation to the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs for final approval. (See Appendix B.)

If an existing course is converted to a distance learning format, the course will be reviewed under Blackboard® by the College Dean to ensure that it meets all criteria of consistency of content and method of evaluation.

It is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that the rigor of programs and quality of instruction are maintained within their courses.

C. Course Review:

All courses, whether campus-based or distance learning, are reviewed either by observation or examination of posted Blackboard® material by the College Dean, to ensure that all criteria are met as set forth in this policy. Results of the review are discussed with faculty to ensure that appropriate changes are made to improve the curriculum. Ongoing monitoring of all distance learning courses on Blackboard® is the responsibility of the College Deans. Upon the recommendation of the College Dean, the DLC will be reconvened if further review of a particular course is deemed necessary. Criteria will include, but will not be limited to faculty evaluation, student satisfaction, student learning outcomes, and student retention.

D. Faculty Interaction with Students:

Communication is essential to the success of all courses. Specific requirements for planned interaction and timely feedback between students and faculty are detailed in course materials and presented on Blackboard®, whether in a distance learning course or a campus-based course. Methods of interaction may include e-mail, phone, fax, chat, or discussion board.

E. Faculty Responsibility:

The instructor is responsible for the course content, delivery of instruction, for evaluating student progress in distance learning courses, as well as for campus-based courses. Faculty is also responsible for timely communication in a distance learning course. Faculty will evaluate courses every semester in which a particular course is taught to determine currency of materials.

F. Accessibility (ADA):

As with campus-based courses, students taking distance learning courses may request accommodations to meet individual needs of the learner. In distance learning courses, special arrangements may be made to deliver the course in an alternative format as needed.

G. Intellectual Property and Third Party Providers:

Distance learning courses are frequently designed and disseminated by other colleges, universities, corporations or non-profit organizations. In the event that Athens State University wishes to purchase or lease modules or entire courses from a Third Party, such courses or modules must be evaluated to ensure that the materials meet all quality criteria set forth by the University, before any legal agreements are signed between parties.

H. University Honesty Policy:

University policy states that it is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with the Honor Code and policies concerning academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aiding and abetting dishonesty, collusion, and unauthorized possession or distribution of academic materials. The honor code and university judicial procedures will be followed in the event of academic misconduct. Copies of the honor code and judicial procedures can be found in the Athens State University Student Handbook.

I. Copyright Compliance:

Faculty is expected to understand and adhere to the copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code), as updated by the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH Act). Copyright law must be followed when performances, displays, copies or other reproductions of copyrighted material are made available to students. This includes the posting of copyrighted material on Blackboard® or other online sites. Under the TEACH Act, it is permissible to make copyrighted materials available to students, providing that such materials (1) do not exceed an amount or duration comparable to that typically displayed in a live classroom setting; (2) are directly related to the course content; (3) are an integral part of the teaching content; (4) are intended solely for and are available only to students enrolled in the course; and (5) are retained only for the class session. The students must be notified that the materials may be subject to copyright protection. Athens State University has appointed a Copyright Agent, Dr. Ron Fritze. This copyright information is also available on the ASU web site www.athens.edu.

J. Testing Policies:

Athens State University requires use of Acxiom by all instructors giving online exams, which adds a much more reliable level of security than the use of usernames and passwords only.

The use of LockDown Browser and/or Tegrity's Remote Proctor as additional levels of security to ensure the integrity and protection of online assessments is presently considered optional and left to the discretion of each instructor.

In addition to the simple combination of user names & passwords to secure student accounts on the institution's Learning Management System (LMS), Athens State currently uses a combination of three additional technologies to ensure the integrity of all online testing through the LMS (**Blackboard Learn™**). Website: www.Blackboard.com

• **Acxiom Identify-X™ Verify**

All instructors giving exams online are required to enable Acxiom on two (2) exams (normally the midterm and final exams) for each course they teach to verify student identities. Each student has a 50% chance of being presented with a list of 3-4 customized identity challenge questions based upon the name and address they provide upon clicking on the link to take their tests. Each question has a selection of five (5) possible multiple choice answers, including "None of the Above". Each question is composed from public records stored on the student inside Acxiom's database of more than 32 Billion records, the same technology used in the online banking industry to verify identities online. Examples of possible questions include "What month were you born in?", "What is your current Zip Code?", and "What year did you graduate from high school?"

Any student failing the identify verification process **automatically triggers a failure notice to their instructor as well as the Blackboard System Administrator.**

Website: www.Acxiom.com

• **Respondus LockDown Browser™**

LockDown Browser is a custom browser students download from the Athens State University website which "locks down" the testing environment within Blackboard. Once inside LockDown Browser, students are prohibited by the software to print, copy & paste, go to external websites, or access other software applications during the examination process. Any open software applications which LockDown perceives as intrusive to the exam process (i.e. Skype, AOL Instant Messenger, etc.) are required by LockDown to be closed before the examination process is allowed to proceed.

Website: www.Respondus.com

• **Tegrity Remote Proctor**

Tegrity's Remote Proctor feature captures all screen activity in Blackboard during an exam, as well as video of the student taking their exam. The student is required to show his/her student ID to the camera before taking an exam. This is to confirm their identity to the instructor who will later review the video in high-speed playback after the student uploads their exam upon completion. The software requires both a webcam and microphone to be operational on the student's computer and captures all activity during the examination process. The student cannot pause the recording during the exam. Website: www.Tegrity.com

1. **Proctored Examinations in Distance Learning Courses Offered Through Athens State University**

Tests will be given as scheduled. The instructor is not obligated to repeat or remind students of tests and assignments dates. It is the student's responsibility to acquire notes and assignments from the website. No make-up tests will be given unless approved by the Instructor.

Procedure for Students Taking Athens State University Proctored Examinations in DL Courses:

- a. Present a valid **picture** I.D. (for example, state drivers license) to the instructor/off-campus center site manager/computer lab manager or other approved proctor personnel.
- b. Sign the test register before receiving your test.
- c. Leave textbooks, book bags, notes, etc. at an area to be determined if designated by the proctor.
- d. Sit in the designated area.
- e. Have only your test, unless otherwise indicated by the proctor.
- f. Complete your test in one session. You must allow enough time to finish your test in the appropriate designated time period.
- g. If you have questions, concerns or needs, ask the proctor for assistance.
- h. Do not talk to other students during testing.
- i. Do not leave the test area during testing, unless approved by the proctor.
- j. Turn in your completed test and any other materials approved by the proctor.
- k. Sign out upon completing your test.

2. **Policies Relative to the Role of Proctor in Distance Learning Courses Offered Through Athens State University**

- a. Proctors shall not be degree-seeking students at Athens State University or the educational institution administering the exam.
- b. When monitoring an exam, a proctor shall remain in the room where the exam is being taken for the entire duration of the exam, unless relieved by another proctor. Proctors may not authorize others to serve as temporary substitute proctors unless those individuals acting as substitutes are authorized by the institution to be proctors. Proctors may not leave the room unless important safety and health exigencies require it.
- c. Proctors shall not be a social acquaintance or relative of a student taking the exam.
- d. Proctors shall not be a co-worker of the person taking the exam.
- e. Proctors shall not be a subordinate who operates within the line of authority of the person taking the exam.
- f. Proctors shall be cognizant of the proper role of a test administrator; such training shall include familiarity with Athens State University policies affecting the administration of exams in a proctored setting.
- g. Proctors shall report cheating and all other forms of academic misconduct known to them as a result of the role of exam proctor.
- h. Proctors shall not assist students in any way during the exam with regard to understanding, interpreting or answering questions on the exam.
- i. Proctors shall make all efforts to maintain an environment in the examination room that is conducive to concentration and the taking of exams. Use of electronic communication devices (i.e. cell phone) is strictly prohibited for all people in the room. The proctor shall prohibit loitering or socializing in the exam room by persons not taking the exam. Other acts of socializing during

the time of the exam that might disturb the environment in the exam room are prohibited.

- j. Proctors and all others in the exam room may be monitored via a camera, with the approval of the site administrator

3. Proctored Distance Learning Testing for Overseas/Military Students Offered Through Athens State University

The test proctor is to be chosen by the student and approved by Athens State University. The proctor should be someone in the company/military who is in a supervisory or human resource position and cannot be a peer or an immediate supervisor. Preferably, the proctor should be someone from the appropriate military testing center.

Responsibilities of the proctors include:

- Receiving, administering and returning exams
- Acting as the liaison between the local facility and Athens State University

III. Faculty:

A. Faculty Qualifications:

Faculty members who teach distance learning courses must meet the same qualifications as faculty who teach campus-based courses at Athens State University. All faculty must possess at the minimum a master's degree with eighteen (18) semester hours of specialization in the teaching field. Adjunct faculty is held to the same standards as full-time faculty.

B. Faculty Training:

Athens State University provides a variety of training workshops and individual training for faculty in the use of Blackboard® and Tegrity®. This training includes information regarding effective online pedagogy. Faculty may not teach distance-learning courses unless this training has been completed. Training will be provided as needed to ensure faculty remain current in the use of the technology.

C. Faculty Evaluation:

Distance learning faculty is evaluated in the same manner as those who teach campus-based courses. Student evaluations are completed online in all courses, whether campus-based or distance learning. The results are used to guide course revision and are given to the faculty member, appropriate college deans, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

D. Faculty Teaching Load:

Faculty members teaching distance learning courses receive the same credit toward their teaching load as do faculty who teach campus-based courses. The decision as to how many distance learning courses a faculty member may teach is left to the discretion of the College Dean. The Dean of each college sets the enrollment limit for each distance course taught by that college. The most important factors in setting an enrollment limit are (1) the enrollment limit already existing for the same course when

offered on campus, (2) the special needs and requirements of the course, and (3) the recommendations of the professor teaching the course.

E. Faculty Users Group:

In addition to training and professional development for faculty related to teaching in distance learning formats, the faculty meets periodically to share information and discuss ideas to enhance effectiveness of courses and quality of courses being taught.

F. Policies on Intellectual Property and Faculty Compensation:

Athens State University will follow policy, as stated in the Faculty Handbook, as stated in Section 3.12.

G. Faculty Support and Supervision:

Full-time and part-time distance learning faculty are supervised as a regular activity of the Dean of the appropriate college. Distance learning courses and programs are integrated into an appropriate management framework within the University.

IV. Student Support Services:

A. Student Services:

Distance-learning students apply for admission, register for classes, and check course availability online, as do traditional students. Information is available online at the University website for distance learning orientation sessions, financial aid, placement services, remedial services, counseling and academic advising. Students should consult an advisor before registering for distance learning, as well as campus-based courses. Advising services are available by a counselor and faculty in the individual colleges. An online advising center offers real-time remote advising services. An on-campus visit may be scheduled to fulfill special requests. Athens State University offers remedial services in the areas of math, writing, accounting and research. Students may access a transcript and unofficial transcripts may be printed online.

B. Student Activities:

The Office of Student Affairs and the Student Government Association serve as mediators between the faculty, administration and the student body and assist with all student activities. Information concerning student activities and clubs/ organizations is available online for both distance learning students and traditional students.

C. Student Complaints/Grievance Procedure:

Any student who wishes to make a formal complaint to the University should refer to the Student Handbook.

D. Marketing of Distance Learning Program

Advertising, recruiting, and admissions information adequately and accurately represent current distance learning courses, requirements, and services available to students. Athens State University advertises all courses each semester both online and in print.

E. Library Resources:

The University ensures that students participating in distance learning courses have access to adequate and appropriate learning resources. Students have access to the University Library and also the virtual library resources within the State of Alabama. Library services available to distance students include the holdings that are accessed through the online library catalog, approximately 40,000 electronic books, online databases, full-text journals available online, research assistance, and inter-library loan. Distance learning students may access the virtual library by using an access login and password that are provided by the Library.

F. University Bookstore:

The Athens State University website provides a link to the Follett Bookstore (the campus bookstore) which provides information for both distance learning students and traditional students. All students may make bookstore purchases using the online service. The bookstore will mail the requested materials to the student.

V. Distance Learning Facilities and Support Services:

A. Distance Learning Equipment and Facilities:

Athens State University provides the necessary equipment and facilities to effectively deliver synchronous courses at a distance. Video conferencing rooms are available to fully deliver courses. Blackboard® is the platform for the Internet-based delivery of online programs. All courses must be placed on Blackboard®, whether online or campus-based. Computers with Internet access are available on campus for students who may need to use campus facilities for distance learning purposes. All courses that require laboratories and clinical site visits, which cannot be completed via technology-based distance learning, are handled with special arrangements made by the faculty member and the College Dean.

B. Funding for Distance Learning:

Sufficient funds for the operation of distance learning programs have been allocated to maintain instructional offerings. The annual University budget provides for the maintenance of equipment and networks and the Vice President for Finance is responsible for this budget.

C. Institutional Technology Responsibility:

The University Institutional Technology Department provides the technical expertise necessary for maintaining equipment and networks, so that the delivery of distance learning programs may occur. This is also true for land-based course delivery, as all courses are placed on Blackboard®. A Blackboard® System Administrator addresses student and faculty concerns with the delivery of distance learning and an online Helpdesk is available for equipment problems. In addition, the IT Department provides training of faculty and staff. The IT Department schedules several training modules for professional development during each year and the College Deans may request additional training for faculty and staff on an as-needed basis. The IT Department provides orientation and training modules available online for students.

VI. Planning and Evaluation:

A. Institutional Planning:

The viability of distance learning programs is included in the planning process. Distance learning is planned to meet the University mission, strategic initiatives, goals and objectives, and is consistent with the University long-range planning document. Distance learning is designed and evaluated according to the same guidelines used for on-campus programs. The effectiveness of distance learning is assessed as discussed in this document. Finally, the results of the assessment are used to make appropriate changes to the long-range plan and to the program.

B. Educational Effectiveness:

The office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness provides reports of educational effectiveness of distance learning to ensure comparability to campus-based programs. This includes assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction. Athens State University collects survey data each year for individual courses, faculty members, and for students. This information is used to make recommendations for course revisions and to better serve the student.

The University assesses student capability to succeed in distance learning programs through a web-based self-assessment instrument and uses the information in advising the student. If the student does not possess the necessary skills, the student is referred to an advisor to discuss the skills needed to succeed in distance learning.

The College of Education and the College of Business use a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate student outcomes in distance learning, as well as in traditional classes. All faculty provide syllabi and necessary course information on Blackboard® for distance learning courses, as well as for campus-based courses. A common syllabus is used for each particular course. Syllabi reflect course goals, the course requirements, and the expected outcomes, which refer to course goals. The College of Education also uses Live Text, through which student portfolios may be kept for future evaluation of success both in distance learning and campus-based courses.