Angelo State University
Operating Policy and Procedure

OP 04.11: Distance Education

DATE: October 1, 2021

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Operating Policy/Procedure (OP) is to provide a framework for the development, implementation, and maintenance of courses, certificates, and degree programs offered via distance education for academic credit at Angelo State University (ASU).

REVIEW: This OP will be reviewed in February of odd numbered years by the vice provost for academic affairs with recommended revisions presented to the provost and vice president for academic affairs (PVPAA).

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

The definition used for distance education in this document is the one adopted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges:

“For the purposes of SACSCOC’s accreditation review, distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or other digital media if used as part of the distance education course or program.” (Distance and Correspondence Education: Policy Statement, 2020)

The Office of the Provost serves as the central repository for distance education program information and support structure. The PVPAA or designee will be assigned responsibility for distance education. The Distance Education Council will serve in an advisory capacity to the provost or the provost’s designee on policy and operational issues related to distance education.

1. Mission for Distance Education

Angelo State University’s commitment to the diverse learner maximizes access to rigorous and engaging education through innovative distance learning opportunities equivalent to those offered face-to-face. ASU provides high-quality, “values-focused
learning experiences that will accommodate a] student-centered teaching and learning environment”\(^1\) anytime and anywhere.

2. **Degree and Certificate Programs Offered Via Distance Education**

Distance Education follows institutional policies and procedures as do all modalities offered by the institution aligning with ASU’s organizational structure, approval processes and administrative structure.

a. Programs offered via distance education will be consistent with the goals and mission of Angelo State University, the relevant academic units, and will be reviewed and approved through the institution’s curriculum approval process to ensure that each course has learning outcomes and credit hour requirements equivalent to face-to-face taught courses **OP 04.05: Approval Process for New Degree Programs**, THECB **Approval of Distance Education including Off-Campus Courses and Programs**, and also in accordance with **OP 02.06: Reporting Substantive Changes to SACSCOC**. Unless otherwise provided in the ASU Undergraduate or Graduate Catalog, all policies, standards, and guidelines for face-to-face instruction apply to programs delivered via distance education.

b. Selection of programs to be offered via distance education is the purview of the appropriate academic unit, which provide oversight of the program to ensure currency of the program, its distance education courses, marketability, capacity, quality and resources. Distance education programs will align with the university’s mission, vision and values, learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree awarded and consistent with all other modalities of the same program.

Assessment/Institutional Effectiveness

c. Assessment of distance education programs is guided by the following policies and best practices:

i. SACSCOC policy statement of **Distance and Correspondence Education**;

ii. **Principles of Good Practice** as defined by the Southern Regional Board for the Electronic Campus (SREC) and the THECB;

iii. **Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education** adopted by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) and THECB; and

iv. Online Learning Consortium’s **Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Education Programs**.

v. Institutional policies include **OP 04.01: ASU Councils & Committees**, **OP 02.01: Institutional Effectiveness**, **OP 06.27: Student Evaluation of...**

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\(^1\) Angelo State University Mission Statement (TTU System Board Approved 2021)
Faculty/Courses, OP 06.28: Annual Performance Evaluation for Tenured and Tenure Eligible Faculty, OP 06.31 Annual Performance Evaluations for Non-Tenure-Track Positions; however, are not limited to these policies as additional assessment processes include further committees, councils, department and faculty processes.

d. Distance education programs are assessed alongside all modalities in the academic program assessment process with respect to attainment of identified learning outcomes and program outcomes.

e. Distance education programs are evaluated in the same manner as face-to-face programs through the institutional academic review process.

f. Once implemented, the assessment of the program continues. If during any part of the assessment and institutional effectiveness processes, it is found that the program is no longer a marketable/viable program for student achievement and success, the continuation of the program will follow SACSCOC guidance of program closure ensuring a sufficient time period for currently admitted students to complete their program.

g. For each major in a degree, or certificate program, whether offered via distance education, or in person, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, assessment of learning outcomes and student success, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field.

h. ASU’s OP 04.13: Dual Credit Courses outlines the framework for initiation, approval, implementation, and tracking of courses for the Dual Credit Program.

i. ASU’s status as an approved National Council of State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (NC–SARA) college allows students from approved states to enroll into distance education programs. NC-SARA is a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education.

3. Distance Education Courses

a. Teaching and learning delivered through distance education use the Angelo State University (ASU) learning management system (LMS).

b. Academic departments may choose to offer new or current courses in a distance education format. All new distance education courses are to be approved through the university curriculum approval process (section 2.a.) and must abide to the SACSCOC/THECB notifications of moving a program to a new modality and/or by percentage of degree.

c. The following apply to all academic courses, regardless of delivery mode:

i. Faculty teaching distance education courses are responsible for the academic integrity of all content used within the course materials, including
accuracy, currency, and compliance with laws regarding copyright and
ASU’s OP 56.10: Intellectual Property Rights.

ii. Academic courses are continually assessed as appropriate and follow
institutional assessment processes.

iii. Students evaluate courses delivered via distance education using the same
course evaluation procedures in effect for face-to-face courses (OP 06.27).
These evaluations include the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery
systems, academic resources, student services, facilities, library,
technology, and access to faculty.

iv. Courses and course materials are archived according to the laws of the
State of Texas and the requirements of the certified retention schedule of
ASU.

v. Courses follow the same registration and transcription practices as those of
other delivery modes.

FERPA, Security, and Privacy

d. Student Privacy: Family Education Right to Privacy Act (FERPA) of Personal
Information, ASU’s FERPA website provides definitions and ASU’s obligations,
including required FERPA training for faculty and staff every two years. ASU’s
FERPA website does not distinguish between face-to-face and distance education
students; therefore, FERPA policy is applied equally to both. Additionally, OP
44.02: Access Control and OP 44.20: Information Privacy and Protection define
information security controls around information privacy and protection.

e. Security of Personally Identifiable Information (PII): Students and Faculty will
comply with information security policy, security controls, and regulatory
requirements as outlined in OP 44.00: Information Security Roles and
Responsibilities. Specific policies referenced within OP 44.00 include OP 44.01:
Acceptable Use policy, which defines requirements for the use of university
information systems by all users and does not designate differences between face-
to-face and distance education users. As stated in OP 44.08: Identification and
Authentication, ASU has policies that define the information security controls for
the purpose of identification and authentication of all users, which includes
Distance Education students.

i. For security purposes, faculty, and students of both the Blackboard and
Banner systems use an assigned personal login ID and unique password to
register and access each of the distance education courses through a secure
portal (i.e. RamPort). In addition, ASU utilizes best practices for strong
password standards with requirements to change passwords every 120
days. Students and employees will adhere to policies on electronic security
that prohibit sharing of passwords as well as requiring students, and faculty
to take precautions against others obtaining access to their university computer accounts OP 44.01.

ii. Additionally, institutional policies and procedures governing the management and security of information resources are defined in OP 44.00, which defines ASU's compliance with Texas Administrative Code 202 and outlines the roles and responsibilities of all constituents who come in contact with sensitive student information. Institutional policies and procedures governing the management and security of protected information of faculty, staff, students, and other constituents and affiliates of ASU are defined in OP 44.01, which dictates that all "users must not use or disclose sensitive information, or data that is otherwise confidential or restricted, without appropriate authorization" (OP 44.01.g). ASU protects the username and passwords of students by requiring the confidentiality of passwords (OP 44.01.d) and having effective information security controls in place as described in OP 44.02, OP 44.08, and OP 44.12: Personnel Security.

4. Faculty/Curriculum and Instruction

“Faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight of distance and correspondence education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.”

a. Academic Qualifications
Qualifications of prospective faculty members are reviewed by department-level search committees in accordance with discipline-specific standards established by each college. The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (PVPAA) monitors this process to ensure that all faculty at ASU are appropriately qualified.

i. Faculty member’s content qualifications and program coordinators are determined by ASU at the department level in accordance with SACSCOC and THECB guidelines for both face-to-face and distance education courses.

b. Course Development

i. Intellectual Property Rights

1. Faculty members retain the authority and responsibility to produce any revised or supplemental course materials to maintain or enhance the accuracy and quality of the distance education course. ASU’s OP 56.10 applies to all programs and courses delivered via distance education.

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2 Guidelines for Addressing Distance Education in Correspondence Courses (SACSCOC, 2020)
c. **Compensation**  
   i. Faculty members develop and deliver distance education courses as part of their regularly compensated responsibilities (*ASU’s OP 6.02: Academic Workload Calculation* and *ASU’s OP 06.14: Faculty Responsibilities and Duties*).

d. **Quality of Courses**  
   i. Faculty members ensure each distance education course results in collegiate-level learning outcomes appropriate and equivalent to face-to-face courses.
   
   ii. Courses are designed in order to meet accessibility standards according to *ASU’s OP 10.24: Establishing Reasonable Accommodation for Students with Disabilities*.
   
   iii. Faculty members acknowledge copyright, trademark, and licensing issues when designing distance education courses. *ASU’s OP 76.01: Copyright Ownership and Administration*.

e. **Delivery**  
   Faculty members are responsible for:
   
   i. the academic management and oversight of distance education courses;
   
   ii. informing students about technical skill prerequisites and required hardware, software, and supplemental materials appropriate to the nature and objectives of the course making it necessary for course participation;
   
   iii. providing for regular and substantive interaction with students, and between students, enrolled in a distance education course;
   
   iv. verifying student identity;
      
      1. Faculty use a wide range of discipline-specific pedagogical strategies (work groups, webcams, synchronous discussions, instructor/student emails, texting, blogging, one-on-one video conferencing, video submissions, etc) in order to foster learning and ensure that the student enrolled in a course is the same student participating in the course.
      
      2. Besides the controlled specific access to the online platform, faculty monitors each student by comparing text, voice and image of the student in a variety of ways throughout each course. All while abiding by *OP 44.08*.
   
   v. regularly monitoring and reporting the last day of attendance;
   
   vi. Student evaluation responses are used in both face-to-face and distance education courses to evaluate faculty members.

f. **Recognition/Evaluation**  
   i. Faculty members’ teaching and scholarly activities related to distance education programs receive the same recognition and evaluation (*OP 06.28* and *OP 06.31*) as face-to-face activities and programs.
**g. Faculty Support & Training**

i. Technical Support

1. The university provides adequate equipment, software, and communications access to faculty members to support interaction with students.

ii. Training

1. Faculty members who teach distance education courses are required to complete professional development related to the effective development and delivery of distance education. Such professional development is approved by the department and dean and completed a minimum of every three years. This training includes consideration of issues regarding academic integrity.

2. Regular training and workshops are offered through E-learning, Instructional Designers, and the Faculty Learning Commons.

5. **Students Support Services**

a. *Advertising, Recruiting, and Admissions:* ASU produces advertising, recruiting, and admissions materials clearly and accurately for distance education students representing programs, requirements, and services available. ASU follows the admissions policies as described in OP **10.01: Undergraduate Student Admissions, OP 42.01: Graduate School Admissions, OP 10.17: International Student Admissions.**

   i. Students enrolled in distance education are provided an orientation with clear, complete, and timely information including but not limited to the use of electronic forms of learning resources, technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of support services, and the Honor Code (including academic integrity).

b. *Academic and Student Support:* Distance Education students are provided reasonable and adequate academic and student support services appropriate to support their successful completion of course work. Academic and student support services offered through distance education (online and at off-site locations) are given the same attention in terms of the quality, integrity, and assessment of offerings as are given to services offered face-to-face. Equal or equivalent services differ by location, mode of delivery, and/or population to meet student needs, governing laws and regulations. Included below are ASU links to academic and support services available to students:

   i. **Academic and Student Services;**

      1. **Technical Services and Tutoring:** In addition to the other academic and student support services, Technology Services
support and Tutoring are available for students 24 hours/7 days a week.

ii. **Student Involvement and Student Life**;

iii. **RAM Pantry**; and

iv. **Student Disability Services**

   1. ASU is committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs or activities of the university, or be subjected to discrimination by the university, as provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAAA) and subsequent legislation.

c. **Complaint Resolution**: ASU seeks to maintain the highest standards of integrity and fairness in its relationships with students. A student who believes that specific actions, practices, or decisions on academic or non-academic matters have been made or carried out in an arbitrary, discriminatory, inequitable, or inconsistent manner, as stated by ASU policy statements, can initiate a complaint.

   i. For more information about ASU’s grade grievance policy, please review **OP 10.03: Grade Grievance**.

   ii. For more information about any form of gender discrimination, including sexual misconduct, please review **ASU’s Title IX website**.

   iii. Students enrolled in distance education courses have the opportunity to evaluate distance education courses, provide feedback for course improvements, and have access to a procedure for resolving complaints, as noted in **ASU’s Student Handbook**. The university encourages students to seek informal resolution of concerns before pursuing a more formal process. However, if a student deems informal efforts unsatisfactory, they may pursue a formal complaint in accordance with the procedure.

6. **Library/Learning Resources**

   a. ASU ensures all distance education students have access to resources equal or equivalent to those available to face-to-face students and that students can effectively use the resources. These resources support various levels of technology access and include online databases, electronic journals, eBooks, electronic access to reference services, partnerships with other institutions for shared borrowing, e-Reserves, and document delivery.

   b. User needs are diverse and varied. Therefore, services strive to meet a variety of informational needs.
c. The library regularly evaluates the effectiveness of resources provided to distance education students and demonstrates services are improved where appropriate. The library is also embedded in all blackboard courses, so services are readily available for EVERY ASU course, regardless of modality.
   i. The library is actively involved in institutional effectiveness processes, feedback surveys from faculty, staff, and students and uses the surveys in their planning for improvement.

d. Instructors provide distance education students information about library services in each course.

7. Financial Support, Budgeting, and Fees for Distance Education Courses

a. Funding and Financial Administration of Distance Education Courses
   i. Academic departments do not receive additional funding for the development and delivery of distance education courses by departmental faculty. Faculty are expected to develop or deliver distance education courses as part of their normal duties and teaching load, as dictated by departmental needs and student demand. ([OP 06.02](#), [OP 06.17](#): Other Employment, Faculty Consulting, and Public Offices)
   
   ii. Beyond just offering individual distance education courses, academic departments may also choose to offer degree programs (including certificates) which are delivered entirely via distance education. This may involve moving existing degree programs to a distance education format, or developing new degree programs to be offered via distance education. In each case, the academic department will consider the incremental costs associated with a proposed new distance education program against the projected additional revenues it may generate. An analysis of projected revenues versus expected costs over a five-year period is a required step in the approval process for any new academic program, regardless of modality ([ASU’s OP 6.14](#)).

b. Tuition and Fees for Distance Education Courses
   i. Tuition and fees charged for distance education courses are specified in the biennial Global Fee Document approved by the Texas Tech University System Board of Regents ([ASU-Tuition and Fees Document](#)).
ii. The fees charged for distance education courses differ from those charged for face-to-face courses. Distance education courses are subject to a distance education fee, except for those distance education courses which are offered to dual credit students. Should a student be registered for distance education courses only, they are not to be charged fees which only apply to students taking courses on the ASU campus.

iii. The tuition and fees that a student are charged for a distance education course are clearly stated and publicly available prior to the start of registration from the ASU’s online tuition estimator.

8. Facilities

a. ASU has adequate facilities and finances to support distance education. The ASU Centennial Master Plan 2028 and the IT Strategic Plan both provide a multi-year plan addressing the technology infrastructure and related services to support distance education. Access to laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the distance education courses and programs are equivalent and sufficient to support students’ learning.