Academic Affairs Policy Statement No. 21

Online Education

1. References

   a. Academic and Student Affairs Handbook, Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, Policy 2.3.7.2, Distance Learning Approval Procedures.
   b. Board of Regents Policy Manual, Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, Policy 3.3.3, Instruction Offered Externally.
   d. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education, August 2018.
   e. Bylaws of the University Council of the University of Georgia, 2005.
   f. University of Georgia Academic Affairs Policy 2.01-13, Course Syllabus Policy.
   g. University of Georgia E-Suffix Policy, University Curriculum Committee.
   i. Revised by the Curriculum Committee and approved by the University Council on September 27, 2017, and by President Jere W. Morehead on October 4, 2017.
   j. Last updated April 2019.

2. Objective

   This comprehensive policy ensures that courses and programs delivered through online education are equivalent in content, level, rigor, and overall educational quality to courses and programs taught in regular classroom instruction. This policy also ensures that courses and programs delivered through online education meet requirements of the University System of Georgia (USG) and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

3. Definition

   In keeping with Board of Regents and SACSCOC definitions, online education is a formal educational process in which the majority of instruction occurs when students and instructor are not in the same place and instruction is delivered using technology. It may be synchronous or asynchronous. The definition of online education does not include noncredit-bearing courses.

4. Responsibility

   a. Instructional Units
i. The academic instructional units and faculty are responsible for deciding whether to offer courses or programs through online education, which courses or programs to offer, and what method of delivery to pursue.

ii. The substantive content of the courses or programs, as well as the assignment of qualified instructors for those courses or programs, is the responsibility of the academic instructional unit, which has primary responsibility for maintaining the quality and integrity of all instruction in its area regardless of the course format or method of delivery.

iii. The instructional unit is responsible for assigning instructors for online education courses and programs who meet the same qualifications as instructors who provide regular classroom instruction.

b. Identity Verification
   i. Faculty assigned as instructors for online education courses are responsible for ensuring that each student who registers in the course is the same student who participates in, is assessed for attainment of student learning outcomes, and receives credit for the course. This identity verification can be accomplished by using the University-provided learning management system with secure log-in and password, or by using graded tests and assignments that are administered face-to-face, or by using UGA email. Another system may be used under the following circumstances: it must be accessed through the University-provided learning management system or provide for verification of student identity by secure UGA log-in and password. Third-party verification services, emerging technologies and practices shown to be effective in verifying student identity, and pedagogical practices such as video-based assignments that establish student identity may be used to verify student identity for testing and exams.

   ii. If students will incur any additional fees related to identity verification, the instructor is responsible for providing that information to the course sectioning officer for entry into the Athena systems so that students will be informed of those fees when they register.

c. Central Administration
   The central administration is responsible for providing instructor’s access to an online learning management system that can be used for all online education courses and supports student verification by secure log-in and password. The Office of Instruction, through the Office of Online Learning and the Center for Teaching and Learning, has central responsibility for supporting online education and promoting best practices.

5. Procedure
   a. A course or program may not be offered through online education unless it has been approved through the University’s curriculum approval process.
b. **Courses**

A course in which the majority of instruction is delivered through online technology is considered to be an online education course. At UGA, courses in which more than 95% of the instruction is delivered through online technology require an E-suffix in order to notify students that these courses may be taken from non-campus locations (Appendix A). When offering an online education course, units must provide additional information in the syllabus as outlined in the online education individual course syllabus (Appendix B).

c. **Programs**

A program in which more than 50% of the courses are delivered through online education is considered an Online Degree in keeping with Board of Regents policies, which require notification of all Online Degrees. The program must be approved through the University’s program approval process.

Approvals for courses and programs to be offered through online education will follow the established course and program approval processes. Course proposals will use the CAPA approval process.

Proposals for new online courses will be approved through the Automated Course Approval Process (CAPA). Proposals for new online programs should be routed through the following approval sequence:

1. Faculty of the academic unit proposing the online program
2. Department Head or Director of academic unit proposing the online program
3. Dean or Vice President of academic unit proposing the online program
4. Graduate School Program Committee, if it is a graduate program
5. Graduate Council, if it is a graduate program
6. Dean of the Graduate School, if it is a graduate program
7. Office of Instruction (for review)
8. Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
9. University Curriculum Committee
10. Executive Committee of the University Council
11. President
12. Board of Regents (for notification)

6. **Guidelines for Distance Education**

a. Courses and programs offered through online education must comply with SACSCOC policies and principles regarding distance education. In addition, courses or programs must meet the following requirements to be considered appropriate for online education:

   i. All online education, as defined in this policy, should be offered in conjunction with a UGA degree or certificate program.
ii. Online education offerings may be provided only by existing academic units (instructional units, schools, or colleges). No new instructional unit, school, or college will be created for the purpose of offering online education courses or degrees.

iii. Online education courses and programs are subject to the same standards, policies, and procedures as all UGA courses and programs, including the protection of privacy for students in compliance with the expectations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the accessibility standards in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

iv. Accreditation standards should be viewed as establishing minimum requirements but not necessarily as high as the standards the University wants to achieve with its online education offerings.

v. The syllabus for an online education course should include the additional information listed in Appendix B.

b. The following factors listed below should be taken into account when deciding whether or not a course or program is appropriate for online education. This is a balancing process that in some cases will point in favor of online education, while in other cases it will not.

i. Important reasons to offer online education include, but may not be limited to, the following examples:

1. An improved or enhanced learning experience for our currently enrolled students.
2. The ability to reach students the University otherwise would not be able to reach, permitting the University to extend degree programs or course work to qualified students who desire a UGA experience but who otherwise would not be able to access one.
3. An improved learning environment for faculty, who may welcome the opportunity to enhance their instructional or research programs.
4. To assist the University in carrying out its mission of serving the entire state of Georgia, both in terms of our land grant status and our charter.

ii. Important reasons to be cautious about online education include, but may not be limited to, the following examples:

1. Dilution of resources.
2. The time-intensive nature of many online education offerings may interfere with faculty time for research and on-campus instruction, resulting in reduced productivity in assigned duties.
3. Less faculty time for on-campus instruction and/or research activities may dilute the educational experience for on-campus students.