Academic Affairs Policy Statement No. 21
Distance 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, July, 2014
   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

2. Background
The University of Georgia first developed formal policies for distance education in 2001, which were further codified through the curriculum approval process in 2010. The current policy updates the 2010 policy based on evolving distance education practice at the University, the creation of the Office of Online Learning, and revised requirements of the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The current policy also integrates previously separate policies related to distance education into one comprehensive policy.

3. Purpose
This comprehensive policy ensures that courses and programs delivered through distance 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 distance education meet requirements of the USG and SACSCOC.

4. Definition
In keeping with Board of Regents and SACSCOC definitions, distance 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 distance education does not include noncredit-bearing courses.

5. Responsibilities
   a. Instructional Units
      1. The academic instructional units and faculty are responsible for deciding whether to offer courses or programs through distance education, which courses or programs to offer, and what method of delivery to pursue.
2. 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.

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

b. Identity Verification

1. Faculty assigned as instructors for distance 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.

2. 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 instructors access to an online learning management system that can be used for all distance education courses and supports student verification by secure log-in and password. The Office of the Vice President for Instruction, through the Office of Online Learning and the Center for Teaching and Learning, has central responsibility for supporting distance education and promoting best practices.

6. Procedures

a. A course or program may not be offered through distance 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 distance technology is considered to be a distance education course. At UGA, courses in which more than 95% of the instruction is delivered through distance technology require an E-suffix in order to notify students that these courses may be taken from non-campus locations (Appendix A). When offering a distance education course, units must provide additional information in the syllabus as outlined in the distance education individual course syllabus (Appendix B).

c. Programs

A program in which more than 50% of the courses are delivered through distance education is considered an External Degree in keeping with Board of Regents policies, which require notification of all External Degrees. The program must be approved through the University’s program approval process. The proposal for an External Degree should be consistent with the University mission and follow the format provided in Appendix C.
7. Approval Process

Approvals for courses and programs to be offered through distance education will follow the established course and program approval processes. Course proposals will use the CAPA approval process. External Degree proposals will be submitted by deans of respective schools or colleges or directors of institutes directly to the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. Graduate program proposals must first be reviewed by the dean of the Graduate School who will then forward them to the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. Proposals will be reviewed by the University Curriculum Committee and subsequently forwarded with a recommendation to the University Council for consideration. University Council recommendations on proposals are forwarded to the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost who will transmit the same to the President of the University for consideration. The President will transmit notification to the Board of Regents. A proposal for a program that will be offered through distance education should follow the format provided in Appendix C.

8. Guidelines for Distance Education

a. Courses and programs offered through distance 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 distance education:

1. All distance education, as defined in this policy, should be offered in conjunction with a UGA degree or certificate program.

2. Distance 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 distance education courses or degrees.

3. Distance 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.

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

5. The syllabus for a distance 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 distance education. This is a balancing process that in some cases will point in favor of distance education, while in other cases it will not.

1. Important reasons to offer distance education include, but may not be limited to, the following examples:
   a. An improved or enhanced learning experience for our currently enrolled students.
   b. 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.
c. An improved learning environment for faculty, who may welcome the opportunity to enhance their instructional or research programs.

d. 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.

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

a. Dilution of resources.

b. The time-intensive nature of many distance education offerings may interfere with faculty time for research and on-campus instruction, resulting in reduced productivity in assigned duties.

c. Less faculty time for on-campus instruction and/or research activities may dilute the educational experience for on-campus students.

Approved by the University Council on April 27, 2010, and by President Michael F. Adams on May 13, 2010. Effective fall semester 2010.
Revised by the Curriculum Committee and approved by the University Council on September 27, 2017, and by President Jere W. Morehead on October 25, 2017.