



Distance Learning Policy

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Athens State University Distance Learning Policy

I. Institutional Policies and Issues:

A. Purpose:

The purpose of the Athens State University Distance Learning Policy is to assure high quality in the delivery of distance learning with regard to instruction and procedures. Athens State University approaches its distance learning activities with the recognition of its mission to assist transfer students, especially from the Alabama Community College System, in the timely achievement of their professional and career goals. This document sets forth guidelines for courses delivered through distance learning mode (DL-Online and DL-Blended Courses).

B. Principles of Good Practice:

Distance learning activities will follow Best Practices, including those found in SACS "Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs," as well as standards set forth by accrediting bodies such as 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 will meet the same quality standards as those that apply to campus-based instruction.

C. Definitions:

Accessibility - Accessibility means that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, interact, and contribute in a course. Accessibility in a distance learning course is determined by the features of the instructional technologies provided by the University and by the way that faculty members use those technologies to create materials and design courses.

Asynchronous - Literally means "not at the same time." Asynchronous tools, such as e-mail and discussion board, allow participants to communicate without having to be online at the same time.

Class Attendance - Attendance in distance learning courses will be determined by the active participation of the student through the completion of class activities, such as the submission of an assignment, completion of an exam, attendance in an online chat, or the posting of a post to a discussion forum. Simply logging in to the course in the learning management system is not considered attendance.

Delivery Mode - The primary method or technology used to deliver instructional information to the student and used for communication between the instructor and the students. At Athens State University, courses are delivered in the following modes:

DL- Online courses are taught 100% online using a combination of asynchronous and synchronous activities providing greater flexibility of schedule and convenience of access to students, while allowing them to meet the same learning outcomes and level of rigor achieved in traditional courses. The delivery of online exams will follow university-approved processes, including the authentication of online test takers and the use of online proctoring tools or live local proctors. Dates and times for required online synchronous activities will be published in the official class schedule.



DL- Blended courses take advantage of the best features of traditional classroom instruction and online education. Students meet face-to-face for 50% or less of the course and complete the rest of their coursework online. A blended course is not simply an online course that requires in-class exams. Blended courses allow faculty and students both the opportunity to build strong personal relationships through face-to-face interaction and the opportunity to explore new types of learning activities that were not possible in traditional courses. Dates, times and locations for face-to-face meetings will be published in the official class schedule.

Traditional courses/hybrid are taught primarily in a face-to-face setting. They have 49% or less delivery with technology and usually will have around 25% of the course delivered through various modes of technology.

Traditional courses are taught in a face-to-face classroom setting. The syllabus and other materials may be posted online and students may be asked to submit some work electronically.

Distance Learning (DL) – Distance Learning (DL) includes fully online and blended courses and 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. Interaction between the instructor and the student is regular and substantive, and can be initiated by the instructor or the student.

Learning Management System (LMS) – Learning Management System (LMS) is a web-accessible software application that provides for the administration of course content, delivery of assessments, communication and collaboration between students and instructors, and the ability to track grades and other relevant performance data. Athens State University is currently licensing Blackboard Learn™ from Blackboard, Inc. as its learning management system.

Office of Academic Support and Instructional Systems (OASIS) – This is a unit within the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs that promotes quality teaching and supports student learning by providing faculty professional development opportunities, creating materials for training and support, administering instructional systems, and providing technical support services for instructional technologies.

Synchronous – Literally means “occurring at the same time.” Synchronous tools, such as text chat, audio chat or video chat, require all participants to be online at the same time.

Teleconference courses are taught face-to-face in specially equipped classrooms that allow live interaction between the instructor and students even though they may be in classrooms in different geographic locations. Dates, times and locations for class meetings will be published in the official class schedule.

D. Review of Distance Learning Policy:

The responsibility for evaluating and revising the Distance Learning Policy resides with the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs.



E. Weather Policy:

Online courses will not be cancelled for inclement weather when University campuses are closed. Students and faculty are expected to access their courses just as they would if the campuses were open. Each faculty member and student is expected to have a contingency plan – their back-up plan for attending their online courses in case their primary computer is unavailable or out of service.

The online component of a blended course is not affected when University campuses are closed for inclement weather. If the blended course had a face-to-face meeting scheduled on the closed campus, the meeting will be rescheduled for another day. Announcements will be posted by the course instructor to notify students of the makeup day and time.

Only in extreme situations, such as the widespread power outages caused by the April 2011 tornadoes, may exceptions to this policy be made by the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. In such severe cases, an official statement concerning online activities will be issued via normal emergency channels. These channels are described in the University's Campus Weather Policy (1700-0926).

F. Holidays:

If the official Athens State University academic calendar shows that the University is scheduled to be closed, or that there are "No Classes", distance learning classes will not meet on that day. While students are not required to submit coursework on that day, they are free to work on courses on their own. Faculty may not be available to respond to student communications until classes resume.

G. Academic Calendar:

Distance learning courses follow the same academic terms as traditional courses. Full-term distance learning courses will commence during the first official week of the semester and conclude during the final exam period at the end of the semester. Half-term distance learning courses will commence during the first official week of the half-term and conclude during the half-term's final exam period.

For distance learning courses that require a final exam, the semester class schedule entry for the course must identify the date and time by which the final exam will be due. Final exams should be due during the regularly scheduled final exam period for a course of that length (full term or half term).

H. Merger of Online Classes:

Faculty members teaching multiple sections of a course are not allowed to merge these sections into a single course shell in the learning management system. Pedagogically, combining individual classes would affect class size, course delivery and the quality of instruction.

Cross-listed sections of a course will be merged into a single course shell in our learning management system. This exception is allowed because cross-listed sections have a combined maximum class size and are treated as one course for determining teaching load.

Exceptions to this policy may be made by the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs for special types of courses, such as Co-Op Practicum courses.



II. Curriculum and Instruction:

A. Academic Integrity of Distance Learning Courses:

Distance learning courses are comparable to traditional, campus-based courses in terms of course descriptions, expectations and learning outcomes.

B. Oversight of Courses:

Like all academic activities, distance learning at Athens State University operates under the purview of the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. The Curriculum Committee, which is made up of faculty from each college, reviews all courses to be offered at Athens State University as described in the Curriculum Review Process (1623-0908). Athens State University adheres to the policy that all courses of the same prefix and number will have the same learning outcomes and level of rigor, regardless of delivery mode.

The process for approval of new courses for distance learning is as follows: When a faculty member desires to offer a new course, a Curriculum Review Form must be submitted to the College Dean. The Dean will review the proposed course to ensure that all standards are met, as set forth in this policy. The Dean may return the proposal to the professor(s)/departments for required changes, as appropriate to meet requirements established by this policy, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and other accrediting bodies (NCATE, ACBSP, etc.). Upon approval of the College Dean, the proposal will be sent to the Curriculum Committee for approval to ensure appropriateness to the University's mission. This committee will report to the Faculty Senate and forward its recommendation to the Office of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs for final approval.

If an existing course is converted to a distance learning format, the course will be reviewed by the College Dean to ensure that it meets all criteria of consistency of content and method of evaluation. If it is determined by the College Dean to be necessary, the course will follow the complete Curriculum Review Process for course modifications.

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 traditional, campus-based or distance learning, are reviewed either by observation or examination 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 is the responsibility of the College Deans and Department Chairs.

D. Class Size – Maximum and Minimum:

Under normal circumstances, a distance learning course that requires intensive communication and collaboration should have a maximum class size of 25 students and a minimum class size of 8 students. Deans of each college will approve any exceptions to the norm.

E. Quality Standards for Courses and Learning Outcomes:

Faculty design quality courses to ensure rigorous learning goals and outcomes that are appropriately assessed and meet institutional, state and in some cases national standards. The design and delivery should be driven by the high quality learning intentions and should fully engage students. In fully online courses, the faculty would have quality course syllabi



that follow the guidelines in the appendix and would normally integrate 10 or more technology tools. Blended courses would use face-to-face activities to engage students and would supplement that engagement in quality learning with appropriate technology tools.

To ensure ongoing quality course design and delivery for its distance learning programs, Athens State University faculty will normally follow the following four phase process:

1. Course design
2. Course delivery
3. Course evaluation
4. Course revision

Each of these four phases are described in the appendix and represent a sense of Best Practices.

F. Faculty Responsibility:

The instructor is responsible for the course content, delivery of instruction, evaluating student progress, assessing learning outcomes, and 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.

G. Accessibility (ADA):

Athens State University makes every effort to select instructional technologies that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. As with traditional, campus-based courses, students taking distance learning courses may request accommodations to meet the individual needs of the learner. In distance learning courses, special arrangements may be made to deliver the course in an alternative format as needed. Students seeking accommodations should review the Disability Services Office Policy Statement (1800-0903) and the Disability Services Office Policies and Procedures Manual (1800-0917), and are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Office.

H. Third Party Providers:

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

I. Copyright Compliance:

Faculty members are 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 to the University's learning management system or to 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. Ronald Fritze. This copyright information is also available on the Athens State web site www.athens.edu.

J. Testing/Assessment:

Faculty are responsible for designing the standards to measure student success in their courses which would include a variety of assessment measures, such as case studies, essays, research projects, labs, papers, exams, applications, and real world experiences.

Faculty are responsible to ensure that academic integrity and high standards are adhered to in the courses. Athens State University supports the *SACS Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement* that states "...the institution must demonstrate that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (1) a secure login and pass code, (2) proctored examinations, and (3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification."

In addition to the simple combination of user names & passwords to secure student accounts on the institution's learning management system, Athens State University currently uses a combination of three additional technologies to ensure the integrity of all online testing. (See Appendix B for a list of tools)

In the event that a student taking a distance learning course is unable to take an examination online, or is required to take a proctored examination, the instructor is normally expected to serve as the proctor for the student. The instructor may proctor exams in a face-to-face setting or using remote proctoring technologies. If the student is unable to be proctored by the instructor, an alternative proctor may be used as discussed in #2 and #3 below:

1. Proctored Examinations:

Examinations will be given as scheduled. The instructor is not obligated to repeat or remind students of examination due dates. It is the student's responsibility to acquire necessary materials from the course in the learning management system. No make-up examinations will be given unless approved by the instructor.

Detailed procedures for the delivery of proctored examinations will be developed, maintained and distributed by the Testing Center and approved by Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs.

2. Proctor Selection Guidelines:

In cases in which it is not possible for the instructor to serve as the proctor for the student, the following alternatives are listed in order of recommended practice:

- The Testing Center at Athens State University or the Testing Center at another institution of higher education or military installation, or the University Centers can proctor the exam.
- A corporate Testing Center can proctor the exam; however, students should be notified in advance of any costs associated with this option.
- An individual approved by Athens State University can proctor the exam, as discussed below.



- a. Proctors shall not be degree-seeking students at Athens State University or the educational institution administering the exam.
- b. 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.
- 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.

3. Proctored Testing for Overseas/Military Students:

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

K. Course Accessibility Dates:

The availability of a course in the learning management system is governed by the following rules:

1. Students can access courses shortly after 8:00 a.m. five days before the first official day of the semester as published in the semester schedule.
2. Last semester's courses are removed from the learning management system 42 calendar days (6 weeks) after the last day of the semester as published in the semester schedule, except courses in which students received an incomplete (see below).
3. Empty course shells for the next semester will appear to faculty members seven (7) calendar days before registration opens for the next semester.
4. Student access to a course ends at 8:00 a.m. five days after the last day of the semester as published in the semester schedule.
5. If one or more students in a course receive an "incomplete":
 - The course will not be removed from the learning management system as normal.
 - The student(s) that received the incomplete will remain in the same course in the learning management system for one additional semester to complete remaining work.
 - The student(s) will not have access to the course in the learning management system during the break between semesters.

III. Faculty:

A. Faculty Qualifications:

Faculty members who teach distance learning courses must meet the same qualifications as faculty who teach traditional courses at Athens State University. All faculty members must

possess, at the minimum, a master's degree with eighteen (18) semester hours of specialization in the teaching field. Adjunct faculty are held to the same standards as full-time faculty.

B. Faculty Professional Development for Distance Learning:

Faculty teaching distance learning courses are expected to develop and maintain currency with the latest technologies and pedagogical techniques by participating in group professional development activities, through one-on-one support sessions or through self-study.

The Office of Academic Support and Instructional Systems (OASIS) provides training for faculty members and staff via professional development workshops, one-on-one sessions and online self-study materials. Topics include the use of specific systems/technologies in distance learning and traditional courses, as well as instructional design training that focuses on course design, pedagogical issues and best practices applicable to all delivery modes. The College Deans may request for the OASIS to provide additional training for faculty and staff on an as-needed basis.

C. Faculty Evaluation:

Distance learning faculty are evaluated in the same manner as those who teach traditional courses. Student evaluations are completed online in all courses, whether traditional or distance learning. The results are used to guide course revision and are given to the faculty member, appropriate College Deans, and the Provost/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 traditional courses. The decision as to how many distance learning courses a faculty member may teach is left to the discretion of the College Dean.

E. Faculty Users Group:

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

F. Intellectual Property:

Athens State University will follow the Intellectual Property, Copyright, Patent, Trademark and Royalties Policy (1500-0918).

G. Faculty Support and Supervision:

Full-time and part-time distance learning faculty members 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. Faculty teaching distance learning courses should contact the OASIS for assistance with technical or pedagogical issues.

H. Faculty Compensation:

Full-time faculty members teaching distance learning courses receive no additional compensation for those courses beyond normal guidelines.

Adjunct faculty members are compensated for distance learning courses at the same rate as traditional classes.



I. Confidentiality of Student Information:

Athens State University complies with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 as amended. FERPA sets forth the requirements pertaining to the privacy of student records, and the rights of students with respect to their education records. For complete FERPA information, see the Athens State University catalog or website.

Faculty cannot post any personally identifiable information about a student to public websites (i.e. websites where the information may be visible to people outside of a course), or require a student to post personally identifiable information to any such websites, without first obtaining written consent from the student.

J. Official E-mail:

Athens State University provides each faculty member with an official e-mail account. All official correspondence must be sent using the University-provided email account, including all course-related e-mails. E-mails sent from within the learning management system will appear to come from the faculty member's official e-mail account.

Faculty members should remind students that they are required to use and maintain their Athens State University student e-mail account and that a personal e-mail account (i.e. not a student's official account) should not be used when contacting University employees or for submitting assignments.

K. Use of External Websites and/or Third-Party Systems:

Athens State University's current learning management system is to be used to host all academic courses. Faculty members desiring to expand the functionality of the learning management system must coordinate with OASIS and be supported by their College Deans to insure the necessary interfacing will work and is appropriate.

L. Tracking Student Attendance:

The U.S. Department of Education requires that students complete academic activities before they may be counted in attendance at any time during the semester. The U.S. Department of Education will not accept the simple act of logging into the University's learning management system as proof of attendance at any time during the semester. Students must complete an academic activity to be counted as attending.

For this reason, faculty members are required to include an academic activity for students to complete early in the semester. Completion of this activity will be used to verify students' attendance and participation in the course. Faculty members will report student attendance to the Office of Student Financial Services via the attendance software by the published deadline date each term, generally the middle of the third week of the term.

At the end of each semester, faculty members must report a last date of attendance for any student receiving a "W", "F" or "I" grade. The last day on which the student completed an academic activity within the course should be used to determine the last day of attendance.

M. Office Hours and Student Expectations for Response:

The goal of faculty office hours is to facilitate student access to the professor at specified times, to assist students, and to respond to needs, especially learning needs. The environment of fully online and technology rich learning environment builds on fast changing technology and speed. Understanding the development of immediacy in this environment,



faculty will clearly indicate in the course material the expectation for response to student requests, including the frequency of faculty interaction with discussion boards. Faculty members teaching fully online distance learning courses are normally expected to respond to student e-mails and questions within 24 hours but not later than 48 hours, understanding that the University has classes in the evenings and on the weekend. Most critically there should be clarity to students about response time.

As stated in the Athens State University Employee Handbook, full-time faculty members should post and hold office hours in a format suitable to support students in their courses. For distance learning courses, office hours may require the use of the telephone, e-mail, text chat, video chat, or other technologies, as needed to provide adequate support for students unable to come to campus. The College Dean will determine the number of required office hours to be conducted and the specific requirements for office hours related to distance learning courses.

N. Instructor Illness/Absence:

If a faculty member must be out of contact for more than 24 hours due to an unexpected reason, such as a short illness or a family emergency, students will be notified by the faculty member through the Announcements area of the distance learning course or via e-mail. The notice will include when the students can expect regular effective contact to resume.

The faculty member will immediately notify the College Dean if the illness/emergency is expected to result in a lengthy absence (more than 72 hours). The College Dean may appoint a substitute instructor to assist students while the instructor is unavailable.

IV. Student Services and Resources:

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 traditional courses. Advising services are available by a Transfer-Advising Center counselor and faculty in the individual colleges. An on-campus visit may be scheduled to fulfill special requests. Athens State University offers tutoring services in the areas of math, writing, accounting and research. Students may access a transcript and unofficial transcripts may be printed online. The University regularly assesses the effectiveness of student services for all students.

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 assists with all student activities. Information concerning student activities and clubs/organizations is available online.

C. Student Complaints/Grievance Procedure:

Any student who wishes to make a formal complaint to the University should refer to the "Grievance Procedure" in the Athens State University Student Handbook on the University's website.



D. Marketing of Distance Learning Programs:

Advertising, recruiting, and admissions information adequately and accurately represents 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 its resources, and also the virtual library resources within the State of Alabama. Library services for distance students include access to the book and periodical holdings through the Library web site, encompassing a sizable repository of electronic books, online databases, and full-text online journals. The Library also provides interlibrary loan services and a variety of means for online research assistance. In addition, students may e-mail or phone the library. Distance learning students may access the online library resources by using authentication procedures that are provided by the Library. The University regularly assesses the effectiveness of library resources and services in all formats and modes of delivery.

F. University Bookstore:

The University Bookstore provides a link (www.athens.bkstr.com) which provides information on textbooks and readings. All students may make bookstore purchases using the online service. The bookstore will mail the requested materials to the student.

V. Distance Learning Support Services and Infrastructure:

A. Distance Learning Infrastructure:

Athens State University provides the necessary equipment, software and facilities to effectively deliver asynchronous, synchronous and blended courses. Video conferencing rooms are available to fully deliver site-to-site courses. The University provides a learning management system for the Internet-based delivery of programs. All courses must be placed on the University's learning management system, whether online, blended or traditional. 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. Institutional Technology Responsibility:

The University Information Technology department provides the technical expertise necessary for maintaining on-campus equipment and networks, the University's student information system, e-mail systems, and other local systems.

The OASIS administers the University's distance learning systems and addresses student and faculty concerns with the delivery of distance learning. A help desk is available 24/7 for technical support by calling 1-888-7-ATHENS.

In addition, the OASIS provides training for faculty and staff via professional development workshops, one-on-one sessions and online self-study materials. Topics include the use of specific systems/technologies in both online and traditional courses, as well as instructional design training that focuses on pedagogical issues and best practices. The College Deans may request for the OASIS to provide additional training for faculty and staff on an as-needed basis.



The OASIS also provides student orientation and training materials for systems/technologies used in Athens State University courses.

VI. Planning and Evaluation:

A. Institutional Planning:

The viability of distance learning programs is included in the University's 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 traditional 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:

Standards and expected learning outcomes for all academic programs are comparable for distance learning and traditional instruction. Assessment data for distance learning are captured through the institutional outcomes assessment process. All educational programs systematically formulate and measure expected outcomes based on the mission and goals of the University and the program purpose as determined by the faculty. Data comparisons between distance learning and traditional students are conducted every term. Assessment methodology includes both direct and indirect methods as follows:

Learning Outcomes Assessment

Student Readiness for Distance Learning: The University assesses student capability to succeed in distance learning programs through a voluntary web-based self-assessment instrument. The information may be used by students to evaluate whether they are ready to take a distance learning course.

Course and Degree Program Level Learning Objectives: Direct methods of assessment are used to capture student achievement in the knowledge, skills and abilities formulated by the faculty in each academic program. Indirect methods include data comparisons of students' self-assessment of eighteen entering and exiting competencies.

Modality Assessment-Student Academic Profile: Comparisons of student grades, retention, and graduation rates between online and traditional courses are conducted.

Program Operational Outcomes Assessment

Course Content and Teaching Effectiveness: Deans and/or Department Chairs evaluate course content and the use of the University Learning Management System by instructor and course format as one of several components of overall instructor's evaluation.

Faculty Technology Support: The OASIS provides training and professional development opportunities, and tracks attendance. The Deans evaluate the data and faculty skill sets related to technology, teaching and effective delivery of courses.



Service Delivery Outcomes Assessment

Student and Faculty Technology Support: Data capture the availability, access, and quality of resources supporting distance learning for students and faculty through a variety of survey instruments.

The Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment keeps official records of outcomes assessment and the use of assessment results for continuous improvement.

VII. Students:

A. Official E-mail:

Athens State University provides each student with an official e-mail account (*username@my.athens.edu*). All official correspondence will be sent to the University-provided student email account, including course-related e-mails and campus announcements. All students are required to use and maintain their Athens State University e-mail account. Personal e-mail accounts (i.e. not a student's official account) should not be used when contacting Athens State University faculty or staff, or when submitting coursework.

B. 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.

C. Class Attendance:

In order to achieve maximum benefit from educational activities, Athens State University expects regular class attendance from all students. Class attendance is determined by active participation within a distance learning course. Participation includes activities such as submission of assignments, completion of exams, attending online chats, and posting of discussions. Simply logging in to the course is not considered participation.

The standards of performance to be met by each student, including specific attendance regulations for each course, will be set by the instructor for the course. Class attendance policies and other course requirements will be published in the course syllabus. See the University's Class Attendance Policy (1600-0909) for additional information.

D. Acceptable Use of Computer Technology:

Athens State University prohibits the use of University computer technology to engage in activities for the purpose of illegal activities or to promote personal gain and/or profit or use of University technology for organizations other than Athens State University. The communication tools provided within a distance learning course are to be used for course-related purposes only.

Students should not transmit messages of a romantic or sexual nature to any person or persons. It is also unacceptable to create, display, transmit or make accessible threatening, racist, sexist, offensive, or harassing language and/or material.

For a complete list of acceptable and unacceptable activities, review the Computer Technology Acceptable Use Policy (1700-0917).



E. Privacy Protection:

Students should be aware that any information posted using course tools within a distance learning course, such as discussions, blogs, wikis, or videos, will become available to the instructor and may be also seen by fellow students. Caution should be exercised when considering posting any personal or confidential information.

F. Ownership of Course Materials:

The materials (documents, files, videos, etc.) provided within a course in the University's learning management system should not be re-posted online outside of the course by students or shared with individuals outside of the course. This includes works posted by other students within a course.

VIII. Support Personnel:

A. Policy Support Personnel:

Questions about this policy should be directed to the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs.

B. Faculty Support Personnel:

Faculty members encountering technical problems with any of the University's distance learning systems should call the University's 24/7 help desk number (1-888-7-ATHENS). The help desk is the first line of contact for technical support. If the issue cannot be resolved by the help desk, the issue will be escalated by the help desk to Athens State University staff for resolution.

Faculty members seeking assistance with pedagogical issues (i.e. course design) should contact the Coordinator of the Center for Instructional Technology.

C. Student Support Personnel:

Students encountering technical problems with any of the university's distance learning systems should call the University's 24/7 help desk number (**1-888-7-ATHENS**). The help desk is the first line of contact for technical support. If the issue cannot be resolved by the help desk, the issue will be escalated by the help desk to Athens State University staff for resolution.

Questions about the content within a course, course policies, grades or grading feedback, resetting test attempts, and other academic issues should be directed to the course's instructor.

For other questions/issues, please call the University switchboard to be directed to the appropriate department.



APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGIES

Athens State University provides faculty members with a large “toolbox” of instructional technologies and allows them to pick the tools which are most appropriate for their teaching style and course content. Currently Athens State University uses Blackboard Learn. The following list identifies the tools native to Blackboard Learn and the additional tools available from other vendors, most of which seamlessly integrate with Blackboard Learn.

Native Tools within Blackboard Learn 9.1

- Announcements
- Calendar
- Contacts
- Content Areas
 - Assessment:
 - Assignments
 - SafeAssign (Safe Assignment)
 - Self and Peer Assessments
 - Surveys
 - Tests
 - Content:
 - Audio
 - Blank Page
 - Content Folder
 - Files
 - Flickr Mashup
 - Image
 - Items
 - Learning Modules
 - Lesson Plans
 - Module Page
 - SCORM Module
 - SlideShare Mashup
 - Syllabus
 - URL
 - Video
 - YouTube Mashup
 - Interactive Tool:
 - Blogs
 - Chat
 - Discussions
 - Groups
 - Journals
 - Virtual Classroom
 - Wikis
 - Textbook
- Email
- Glossary
- Grade Center
- Portfolios – part of Blackboard Content System



- Rubrics
- Tasks

Third-Party Tools/Features/Sites

- Blackboard Collaborate (formerly Wimba) Tools
 - Web Conferencing (Wimba Classroom)
 - Instant Messaging (Wimba Pronto)
 - Voice Tools (Wimba Voice...)
 - Voice Recording
 - Voice Board
 - Voice Email
 - Voice Podcaster
 - Voice Presentation
- Content Tools
 - NBC Learn
 - SoftChalk
 - Tegrity Campus
- eBook Tools
 - Barnes & Noble NOOK Study
 - Follett CafeScribe
 - McGraw-Hill Create
- Homework/Testing Tools
 - Acxiom Identity Tool
 - McGraw-Hill Connect
 - Respondus LockDown Browser
 - WebAssign
- Other Tools
 - SmarterMeasure – DL readiness quiz
 - Smarthinking – online tutoring

APPENDIX B

Course Design Phase

Distance learning courses will be designed to meet the same learning outcomes and level of rigor as traditional courses. To achieve this goal, course designers must consider the differences that exist between the traditional and online delivery formats. It is important to note that a distance learning course is not to be designed as a self-study or self-paced course.

When designing distance learning courses, faculty members are normally expected to follow these guidelines after deciding on blended or fully online course delivery:

- University, College and Department course design (see below) will be followed to ensure that course content will be well organized in a logical system that makes it easy for students to locate and review.
- The course syllabus will follow University, College and Department guidelines and be clearly written and easily located by students. Examples of information that will usually be included in the syllabus are:
 - Course details from the University catalog, such as course number, course title, total number of credit hours and distribution (lecture, lab, etc.), course description, and prerequisites.
 - Information on the textbook(s) and other required course materials to be purchased by the student for use in the course, including potential references.
 - Instructor information, including contact information and preferred method of contact. At a minimum an instructor's name, telephone number, Athens State University e-mail address, and office hours should be given.
 - Clearly stated course objectives and course requirements that are consistent, appropriate for the level of the course, and reasonably comprehensive.
 - Communication guidelines, including response time, will be clearly stated. Under normal circumstances, faculty members teaching a distance learning course are expected to clearly state the response time to student e-mails and requests.
 - Specific requirements for planned interaction and timely feedback between students and faculty. Communication is essential to the success of students in all courses, but this is especially true in distance learning courses because students can easily feel isolated and lose motivation. Methods of interaction may include e-mail, phone, fax, text chat, voice chat, video chat, discussion board, and other emerging technologies. Dates for required synchronous activities in online courses will be listed in the entry for the course in the official semester class schedule.
 - Evaluation criteria that clearly identify the assessment activities to be completed by students and the value of each. Short descriptions of each assessment activity will be provided in the syllabus and/or a separate handout within the course.
 - Course policies, such as the handling of late submissions, makeup work, and expected grading turnaround time, will be clearly stated. Under normal

circumstances, faculty members are expected to grade and return student submissions within one week.

- University policies and statements, such as information on Disability Accommodation and Academic Misconduct.
- Suggested resources/contacts for support materials (e.g. Library), support services (e.g. online tutoring), technical support, and other helpful supplementary information (e.g. readings).
- Course calendar or schedule of activities. This may be included with the syllabus or provided as a separate handout within the course.
- Clear guidance will be provided to students on how to successfully complete each course requirement. Some examples include writing detailed instructions, providing grading rubrics, and posting example solutions to similar assessments.
- A variety of instructional tools and types of content – typically ten or more – will be used to facilitate learning. Appendix A below provides a list of tools and types of content currently available through the University’s learning management system and third-party tools/systems. For example, a distance learning course will typically include:
 - Announcements tool
 - Contacts tool – instructor information from the syllabus
 - Content tools – Examples include:
 - Items/Files – syllabus, handouts, PowerPoint files, readings, images, etc.
 - Tegrity Recordings – course intro, lectures, reviews, etc.
 - Audio/Video – YouTube mashups, NBC Learn videos, Voice Recordings, or other media files
 - External Links – web site URLs
 - Communication tools – Examples include:
 - Email tool
 - Discussion Boards and/or Voice Boards
 - Web conferencing, instant messaging or other synchronous tool
 - Assessment – Examples include:
 - Assignments
 - Discussions
 - Safe Assignments
 - Self & Peer Assessments
 - Tests
 - Blogs/Journals
 - Wikis
 - Evaluation/Feedback – Examples include:

- Discussions
 - Surveys
 - Journals
- Both student-centered and instructor-centered learning activities can be used.
 - Plentiful opportunities will be provided for synchronous and/or asynchronous communication. Examples include e-mail exchanges, online chats, discussion forums, or blogs.
 - Collaboration activities can be used to encourage student-to-student interaction. Examples include group assignments, wikis, or self and peer assessments.
 - Opportunities for self assessment will be available to test students' knowledge and help them prepare for required assessments. Examples include sample tests, draft paper submissions, or review activities like flash cards or other memory games.
 - Assessments will be well designed, match the objectives and requirements of the course and require higher order thinking.
 - An orientation to course materials and course navigation will be provided. An example would be a video recording that reviews the syllabus and the structure and content within the course in the learning management system.
 - Accessibility guidelines will be followed.
 - In addition to the end-of-semester Faculty Course Evaluation, students will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the course to the instructor throughout the semester. Examples include an open feedback discussion forum, online private journal or periodic feedback surveys.

Course Delivery Phase

During the semester, faculty members teaching distance learning courses will:

- Stay in regular communication with students and encourage students to actively communicate with one another and the instructor. Examples include regularly posting announcements, actively using discussion forums and offering online synchronous lectures or review/study sessions.
- Identify students that are falling behind in the course, or that are having difficulty with the course material, and work with the student to identify strategies to help them improve their performance in the course. Examples include offering one-on-one online meetings, suggesting the student seek online tutoring or helping the student establish an online study group within the course.
- Respond to student e-mails and discussion posts within the response time frame stated in the course syllabus.
- Grade and return student submissions within the grading turnaround time stated in the course syllabus.
- Actively review student feedback on the course and work to answer and address any concerns that are raised.



Course Evaluation Phase

At the end of each semester, faculty will:

- Download and retain a copy of the students' grades for the course, and are encouraged to also download and retain an archive of the complete course.
- Carefully review all feedback provided by students throughout the semester and student performance on all assessments to determine if the course met expectations.
- Determine if the course needs no revision, minor revision or significant revision.

Course Revision Phase

Routine minor revisions, such as changes to the due dates, visibility dates, or learning management system settings, are the responsibility of the faculty member and are expected as part of normal faculty duties.

If a distance learning course is determined by the faculty member to need significant revision, such as a major change to the course's learning outcomes, the College Dean should be contacted to determine if the revision will require the Curriculum Committee to review and approve the new design.



Appendix C

TESTING/SECURITY TOOLS

The following tools are available to faculty to ensure academic integrity and to use to assist in verifying the student registered is the actual student doing the work and taking exams.

- All instructors giving exams online should enable the **Acxiom Identify-X™** tool on two (2) exams (normally the midterm and final exams) for each course they teach to verify student identities. Any student failing the identify verification process automatically triggers a failure notice to their instructor as well as the System Administrator. The instructor reviews a detailed report on the failed authentication attempt and determines how to handle the situation by following the Academic Dishonesty policy as stated in the Athens State University Catalog.
- **Respondus LockDown Browser™** is a custom web browser that students download from the Athens State University website which “locks down” the testing environment within Blackboard Learn™. Once inside LockDown Browser, students are prohibited by the software from printing, copying & pasting, visiting external websites, and accessing 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 to be closed before the examination process is allowed to proceed.
- The **Remote Proctor feature of Tegrity Campus** captures all screen activity in Blackboard Learn™ during an exam, as well as video of the student taking the 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.