Online and Distance Education Guidelines

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Introduction

This document outlines the responsibilities of those departments and divisions that support and are responsible for the success of distance education at MTSU, specifically the areas of technology, distance faculty and student services and resources, and administration. MTSU's Online and Distance Education Guidelines are revised annually and reviewed and approved by the MTSU Distance Education Committee. A copy of the Guidelines is provided to all course developers at the beginning of the course development or redevelopment process.

Distance Education Mission Statement

The mission of distance education is to provide quality academic instruction to ageographically dispersed student population.

Distance Education Vision

MTSU's Distance Education vision is to provide learning experiences through technology-driven outreach.

Distance Education Definition

Distance education occurs when there is a physical separation of the instructor and the learner and when communication and instruction take place through, or are supported by, any technological means such as, but not limited to, telephone, radio, television, computers, satellite delivery, interactive video, or any combination of present and future technologies. [254 MTSU Distance Education Policy](#)

Distance Education Purpose

Distance education is an established and effective method for extending educational opportunities. To provide the citizens of Tennessee with greater access to postsecondary education, Middle Tennessee State University affirms the effectiveness of distance education; recommends the use and development of distance education technologies, when appropriate, to meet student learning outcomes; and encourages academic departments to take advantage of such opportunities in carrying out their individual missions. [254 MTSU Distance Education Policy](#)

History

MTSU Online began in the 1997 Fall Semester offering seven courses with 53 student enrollments. Today, MTSU Online is nationally recognized, having been endorsed by the [Online Learning Consortium (OLC)](#) for outstanding program administration. MTSU offers many online and hybrid programs both at the undergraduate and graduate level. A current description of available programs is listed on the [Online Programs website](#).

MTSU is a public institution accredited by the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)](#), and is governed by its own [Board of Trustees.](#)

Distance Education Course Definitions

MTSU is committed to providing high quality distance educational experiences for its students, and faculty members can develop and teach a variety of alternative delivery courses. Below are the types of alternative delivery courses MTSU faculty may develop and the definitions of each.

- Online
    - o All class instruction takes place in an online environment.
    - o May include optional meetings/orientations. Students cannot be penalized for non-attendance. (The meeting dates/times are listed in Pipeline as memo notes,and

students can click on the CRN to review. Optional meetings will not create time conflicts.)

- o May include proctored, on-campus exams. Students who cannot make the scheduled date/time/location must have the option of taking the exam during aspecified timeframe at an approved, off-campus location.

- o No physical attendance is required.

- o MTSU distance education fee applies ($30 per credit hour, graduate andundergraduate).

- o Must be reviewed and approved through University College.

- o Development and redesign stipends apply based on number of the number of credit hours developed or redeveloped.

- o A "D" section number is attached.

- Hybrid

    - o Online courses with *required* meetings of up to 50% of the conventional course.

    - o MTSU distance education fee applies ($30 per credit hour, graduate and undergraduate).

    - o Must be reviewed and approved through University College.

    - o Development stipends apply based on number of credit hours developed.

    - o A "D" section number is attached.

- Accelerated Online Courses

    - o Courses offered online in an 8-week schedule each Fall and Spring semester.

    - o Courses developed for online delivery may be offered in accelerated format.

    - o Students may take only 9 hours in each part of term (A1 or A2).

    - o Students may mix accelerated courses with full-term courses not to exceed 18hours total.

    - o Students must register for A2 courses during regular registration.

    - o Students are not permitted to add the A2 courses after late registration ends exceptby special permission.

    - o May include optional orientation and proctored exams (exams would be listed in Pipeline as memo notes. Students must click on the CRN to view notes. Optional meetings will not create time conflicts.).

    - o A "D" section number is attached.

- Synchronous Online

    - o All class instruction takes place in an online environment (D2L) and via Zoom Videoconferencing.

    - o Class meets online at specified days and times during the semester. Duringcourse scheduling, these meetings may create time conflicts.

    - o Course may require proctored exams.

    - o Recording of class sessions may occur.

    - o Lectures are not used beyond the current semester without agreement of thefaculty.

    - o Viewing of the archived lectures is limited to the enrolled class or a person with a legitimate educational purpose for viewing (such as a department chair).

    - o MTSU must request written consent of any person whose image was captured,including

a guest lecturer, if an archive is distributed beyond the class.

- o MTSU distance education fee applies ($30 per credit hour, graduate and undergraduate).
- o Development and redesign fees apply based on number of the number of credit hours developed or redeveloped.
- o Course is reviewed/approved through MTSU Online.
- o A "D" section number is attached.

Alternative delivery courses which do not require approval through the University College process and for which development/redesign fees do not apply are listed below.

- Web-assisted
  - o A blend of classroom (more than 15 hours per semester spent on campus) and online instruction which uses the internet to reduce the time traditionally spent inthe classroom. For example, a MW class will meet Monday or Wednesday (or 1.5 hours per week).
  - o The regular weekly meeting(s) must adhere to standard meeting time requirements.
  - o D" section number is not attached
  - o Distance education fee is not assessed
  - o Course is not reviewed/approved through University College

Roles and Responsibilities

University Roles and Responsibilities

The university must provide support to the administration, departments, and faculty to enable them to offer online and hybrid courses. It is also responsible for offering the same services to students taking online courses and programs that it provides for students taking traditional, on-ground courses and programs. The following are distance education services provided by the university.

SACSCOC

MTSU is responsible for complying with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Principles of Accreditation. Section 10: Educational Policies, Procedures, and Practices states, "6. An institution that offers distance or correspondence education":

- ensures 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.

- has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.

- ensures that students are notified, in writing at the time of registration or enrollment, of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity. (Distance and Correspondence Education)

Student Authentication

This verification is accomplished by requiring the MTSU student: 1) to use a secure login and pass code into the MTSU learning management system (currently D2L), and/or (2) to sit for proctored examinations.

MTSU uses students' usernames and passwords to verify that a registered student is the same students who participates and earns academic credit for an online course. All instruction must take place inside the learning management system (LMS) in order to maintain verification integrity. Students must use their assigned username and create a password that meets university

requirements to be authenticated.

Verification may also occur if faculty teaching distance education courses require students to take an in-person or online proctored exam as long as required proctoring is noted on the course prior to students' registration.

MTSU Definition of Distance Education

Distance education occurs when there is a physical separation of the instructor and the learner and when communication and instruction take place through, or are supported by, any technological means such as, but not limited to, telephone, radio, television, computers, satellite delivery, interactive video, or any combination of present and future technologies. 254 Distance Education Policy

Credit Hour

MTSU defines a credit hour in Policy 294 as follows:

In the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 34 Section 600.2, the US Department of Education defines the credit hour as an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than:

1. One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten (10) to twelve (12) weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

2. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in the definition above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

The responsibility of ensuring that credit hour requirements for time and student learning outcomes are met lies with the faculty member instructing the class and with the academic department chair. The student learning outcomes for a course must be the same regardless of whether the credit hour(s) is delivered in a traditional format or through equivalent academic activities.

In situations where a credit hour(s) is offered in a non-traditional format and no class section is offered in the traditional format, department chairs will consult with the instructor to ensure that credit hour(s) requirements are similar to those for the same course offered in a traditional format. This includes but is not limited to internships, independent studies, experiential learning activities, and online courses.

Faculty Workload

Faculty workload is determined by the academic department chair and college dean. MTSU's Guidelines for Determining Faculty Workload includes information on expectations of faculty teaching online courses.

Adding, Dropping, and Withdrawing from Courses

Deadlines for adding, dropping, and withdrawing from distance education courses are the same as for courses taught on campus.

Grades

Online courses are subject to the same grading policies and procedures as conventional courses. Faculty teaching online courses should consult the appropriate current Undergraduate or Graduate Catalogs for guidance.

Financial Aid and Class Attendance

Students enrolled in online courses should verify their financial aid eligibility with the MTSU Financial Aid Office. Students taking online or hybrid courses must meet the same eligibility requirements for financial aid that they would have to meet if they were taking on-campus courses.

To comply with federal regulations regarding student engagement and participation in online courses, MTSU must demonstrate that a student participated in class or was otherwise engaged in an academically related activity, such as contributing to an online discussion or initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a course-related question. Students who are reported as non-attending may be assigned a grade of FA, which may also have financial aid implications.

Course Enrollment

The University College recommends enrollments of 25 students for undergraduate MTSU online or hybrid courses and 15 students for graduate courses. However, it is recommended that first-time online instructors limit their enrollment to 15 students. Department chairs may increase enrollments as needed and as first-time professors become more familiar and comfortable with online instruction. These numbers are only a guide and may be modified based on the course.

College Roles and Responsibilities

Academic deans are responsible for the following:

- approving the development of each online and hybrid course

- reviewing and approving for delivery new and redesigned online courses when the course designer is a department chair or school director

- ensuring distance education students have access to appropriate advising services

Department Roles and Responsibilities

Department chairs are involved in the development and redesign of online and hybrid courses from the beginning of the process. Roles and responsibilities of departments related to distance education are below.

Online Course Scheduling and Cancellation

o   Online and hybrid courses are usually taught as part of a faculty member's course load.

o   It is the department's decision to cancel any course due to low enrollments.

o   Academic departments are responsible for working with the Scheduling Center to schedule new online and hybrid courses for the target semesters of delivery noted in the Online and Hybrid Course Development Agreements.

o   New online and hybrid courses may be added to the semester schedule **no later than four weeks prior to the start of the semester** if the review/approval process has been completed. Exceptions must be approved by the Provost's office.

o   New online and hybrid courses will not be added to the semester schedule until they have been peer reviewed and reviewed and approved by the department chair and the Course Approval Form returned to the MTSU Online Faculty Services Office.

o   The course delivery method cannot be changed after registration begins.

o   Requests to reserve on-campus facilities for distance course mandatory and optional meetings must be submitted to the Scheduling Center.

Online Course Review and Approval

o   Chairs are responsible for approval of a course development proposal, contract, final review, and delivery approval.

Other Responsibilities

- o Ensure all faculty receive training on the MTSU learning management system or have prior online or hybrid teaching experience using the university's LMS.

- o Offer and staff additional sections of online courses when possible.

- o Appoint new lead designers when original course designers leave MTSU or no longer teach online.

University College Roles and Responsibilities

University College provides central coordination, through MTSU Online, for the development or redevelopment and delivery of distance education courses and programs. This central coordination contributes to a uniformity of delivery ensuring consistency of student access while maintaining instructional flexibility. The College recruits faculty members to develop and deliver distance education courses, provides services specific to distance learners, disseminates materials, works with departments and Scheduling to ensure approved distance courses are added to semester schedules, and works with ITD to provide technical assistance and training for faculty developing and teaching distance education courses. The specific services provided by University College are below.

- o MTSU Online coordinates the development and delivery of MTSU distance education courses and programs.

- o MTSU Online Student Services provides services and resources specific to distance learners.

- o University College provides a contact form for visitors to its website. Comments are directed to the appropriate offices and answered promptly.

- o The College conducts regular distance education student and faculty satisfaction surveys. The summarized results are distributed at the end of the semester in which they are given to MTSU's departments and faculty.

MTSU Online Faculty Services

This office provides resources, assistance and direction to faculty who wish to develop and teach online and hybrid courses. Responsibilities include:

- o Ensure that faculty are aware that only courses approved by the University Curriculum Committee or the Graduate Council are eligible for online or hybrid development. Online or hybrid development is a change in delivery method, not a change in curriculum. Courses that are new to MTSU (those which have not yet been taught in the classroom) must receive approval from **the MTSU Curriculum Committee** or the **MTSU Graduate Council**, as appropriate, prior to development.

- o MTSU faculty are paid a fee (based on credit hour of course developed) by University College for online and hybrid course development if the course is developed per UC criteria. Department chairs determine which faculty member in their department will design a course and receive the development fee. Fees are only paid for those courses notpreviously developed in the online or hybrid format. Approved courses are used as mastersfrom which to clone additional sections for instruction. Minor revisions are permitted within the cloned sections.

- o All online and hybrid courses must be developed in accordance with criteria stipulated by MTSU Online and the *Online and Distance Education Guidelines.* The Guidelines specify the use of, and training on, the learning management system (LMS) supported by the university; a course review conducted by a faculty peer; and a review and final approval by the department chair. The reviews are conducted using the Peer Review Form.

- o Provide in the LMS, and update annually, a syllabus template for use in online courses

to provide information and resources specific to online learners.

o   Provide direction to individuals/offices who can assist instructors and students with hardware and software questions or who can refer the questions to the appropriate sources.

o   Coordinate the administration of online and hybrid courses by assisting instructors with tasks that are not a part of their usual duties and are unique to online and hybrid course instruction.

o   Distribute course access instructions to instructors.

o   Maintain the MTSU Online Faculty Services website which provides current best practices and other resources for faculty who wish to develop and teach online and hybrid courses

o   Maintain the [MTSU Online](#) website which provides information and resources for prospective MTSU online students.

o   Coordinate the Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) Program and assign OFMs to all faculty who design and redesign online and hybrid courses.

o   Update the online Permission of Department (POD) Form prior to each semester.

o   Assist faculty with scheduling on-campus orientation and testing facilities when requested.

o   At the request of distance education faculty, contact students who appear to be having difficulty accessing their online courses.

o   Provide professional development opportunities for faculty who design and teach online and hybrid courses, when funding is available.

o   Provide computer software for faculty teaching distance courses when funds are availableand when site licenses are not available.

Distance Education Student Services

MTSU Online Student Services is a central office dedicated to assisting prospective andcurrent distance learners. Responsibilities include:

o   Maintaining, and regularly updating, the Student Services website that serves as a "front door" for students to locate information related to online education.

o   Distribute course access instructions to students.

o   Provide resources such as online tutoring and directions to other student resources.

o   Conduct the Student Satisfaction Survey

Faculty Course Developer Responsibilities

Preparation for Online Course Development

o   Prior to development, review the Online and Distance Education Guidelines and the Peer Review Form.

o   Determine the best delivery method for their course based on content, student needs, and according to MTSU distance course definitions.

o   Use development shells for course creation as opposed to semester shells. Content will be lost if a semester shell is deleted.

o   MTSU requires full-time and adjunct faculty to receive training on the learning management system licensed and supported by the university or certify that they have prior online teaching experience with this system prior to instruction.

o   Successfully complete Sexual Harassment prevention training offered by the university

before (or shortly after) the beginning of online course instruction.

o Participate in required training with the Instructional Design Specialist in the LT&ITC to plan the design of new courses.

o Meet with the assigned Online Faculty Mentor (OFM) and as needed during course development.

o Complete required Accessibility Training.

o Complete the course per the deadline noted in the Online Course Development Agreement.

Documentation of Online Course Development

o Complete and submit for approval all course development documents to MTSU Online Faculty Services:

o Online or hybrid Course Development Agreement

o Signed Training Confirmation Form

o Scheduling Center Scheduling Request Form for campus facilities for mandatory hybrid and optional online course meetings

Course Development Guidelines

o Develop online courses that:

o provide original content housed within the university supported LMS (D2L)allowing students to complete course requirements within the course and to authenticate students taking the course.

o limit instruction of course content and do not share student educational records in e-publisher or other third-party vendor websites because of financial aid, FERPA and other regulations.

o provide ease of uploading and downloading files and documents; course file sizes should be optimized for the web so that they can be quickly uploaded and downloaded.

o respect intellectual property rights (http://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/140.php)

o meet ADA accessibility standards (http://www.mtsu.edu/ada/); include accessibletext, headings and alt tags (at minimum)

o provide ease of instruction by other faculty members

o provide students with detailed information on all assignments and course requirements

o provide interactivity within course content per MTSU's Distance Education Policy 254

o ensure that online and hybrid courses meet the same standards and criteria set by departments for classroom courses

Online Course Approval

o When the course is complete, conduct a self evaluation (using the Peer Review Form) and submit it to the assigned reviewer.

o Take into consideration changes recommended by the reviewer, and resubmit the self-evaluation, if necessary.

o When the course is approved, serve as the lead developer of the approved course for the term of the three-year contract. The duties include:

  • sharing approved course content with sectional instructors

  • updating the master shell each semester as necessary

  • familiarizing other professors with instruction of the course and serve as

instructional mentor throughout the semester

- assisting new instructors with revisions of the Welcome page, Contact Information, and course calendar

- working with department to obtain textbooks and other course materials

- **Note**: These services should be provided by the lead developer even if the developer is not teaching a section of the course during the semester.

Course Redevelopment

o Redevelop the course when the three-year contract expires.

o The same development, review, approval processes apply for a redevelopment.

Online Course Instruction Responsibilities

o Faculty (adjuncts or full-time) teaching sections of online courses developed by others must meet with the lead course developer to review course content and to revise the welcome page and faculty contact information. ***Online course content must not be changed by faculty teaching sections of an approved online course***.

o Faculty new to online instruction must complete the MTSU Online Certification course.

o Submit the online and hybrid course information to the department for inclusion in the target semester's schedule. New online and hybrid courses are added to the semester schedule **no later than four weeks prior to the start of the semester** if the review/approval process has been completed. Exceptions must be approved by the University Provost's office. The course delivery method may not be changed after registration begins.

o Adhere to and support MTSU's Information Technology Resources Policy and encouragestudents to do the same.

o Review copyright resources as they pertain to the Internet and the World Wide Web.

o If external websites are used in the design of online and hybrid courses to enhance student learning, provide detailed descriptions of how the sites will be used in conjunction with required D2L activities and assignments.

o Follow these instructional recommendations and best practices each semester and share withsectional instructors:

o Login to course the day courses begin.

o Login to course at least three times per week.

o Respond to student questions (e-mails and non-graded discussion postings) within 24 to 48 hours.

o Post assignment feedback and grades as soon as possible, and within two weeks of the assignment submission, depending on the nature and length of the course and assignment type.

o Follow the University posted holiday schedule during all academic terms.

Distance Education Student Responsibilities

o Access course on the first day of class.

o Review MTSU student regulations and policies, obtain required course materials and textbooks, review meeting information (if applicable), etc. at MTSU Online Student Services.

o Complete the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) at the conclusion of thesemester.

o Have access to a reliable computer with an internet connection.

    o   Review the MTSU <u>open computer labs</u> website for hours of operation.

Information Technology Roles and Responsibilities

The <u>Information Technology Division (ITD)</u> supports information technology resources for faculty and students (both on campus and online), including the <u>Academic Instructional Technology Center</u>, the <u>Help Desk</u>, and faculty and student <u>email accounts</u>.

College Of Graduate Studies Roles and Responsibilities

The <u>College of Graduate Studies</u> serves as a coordinator for admission and graduation of students enrolled in MTSU graduate programs. Persons wishing to pursue an online or hybrid graduate degree at MTSU must make application to and be granted admission by the College of Graduate Studies in addition to being accepted into a particular graduate program. The college provides a Graduate Program Liaison for each online or hybrid graduate program just as it does for on-ground graduate degrees. These individuals work with the student and graduate program coordinator to ensure that all requirements of the program, college and university are met.

James E. Walker Library Roles and Responsibilities

The Walker Library provides the following services in support of online and hybrid courses:

- o The library's catalog
- o Electronic course reserves in which instructors' materials can be accessed throughthe library catalog
- o Online databases, including many with full-text journal articles, which can beviewed, printed, and emailed from any location
- o <u>Online Research Guides</u> - created by librarians and provide links to subject-specific library resources
- o Online request form for delivery of requested library materials by mail orelectronically to students who are without access to needed materials
- o <u>Ask a Librarian</u> page on the library's website which provides access to online chat service for immediate assistance during library hours
- o <u>Distance Education Library Services</u> webpage which contains information and links useful to online students

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