

MONTANA BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Policy and Procedures Manual

SUBJECT: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Policy 303.7 – ~~Distributed Learning; Montana University System Online Learning~~

Effective: March 25, 1999; Issued: June 2, 1999 Adopted: November 4, 1988; Revised: September 22, 2011

I. Board Policy

A. ~~Scope and Purpose~~

~~1. This policy is designed to encourage the development and use of distributed learning in the Montana university system (MUS) while at the same time ensuring a level of quality equivalent to that of traditional, classroom-based instruction.~~

~~3. The commissioner of higher education shall appoint a member of the commissioner's staff to be the distributed learning coordinator-director of eLearning business and to chair an eLearning advisory committee (EAC) on distributed learning and mediated instruction. The EAC is comprised of Montana university system (MUS) eLearning leaders who collaborate to benefit learners and to align campus eLearning efforts. The EAC is composed of one primary representative from each stand-alone campus in the MUS and from each of the community colleges. EAC campus representatives are appointed by the respective campus chief academic officer. The purpose of the advisory committee EAC will be to advise the system and the academic, research, and student affairs (ARSA) committee of the board through the eLearning director, through the council of academic officers, on matters related to present and future delivery of distributed online education and other matters related to the use and types of educational technologies associated with quality online education, including the acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery and/or learning systems.~~

~~2. The board of regents shall consider an institution's proposal to offer existing programs via distributed learning methodologies to be a request for a level I approval. Single courses meeting institutional academic standards do not require approval.~~

~~4. The commissioner will encourage, facilitate and coordinate the distributed learning activities of the institutions.~~

B. The most recent update to the accreditation standards of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the regional accrediting body for the Montana university system and the community college campuses in Montana, has embedded the language, "wherever offered and however delivered" heavily into its standards for accreditation specifically to eliminate separate standards associated with online learning. As a matter of practice, the EAC accepts and endorses a similar approach to board of regents (BOR) policies and practices governing both traditional face-to-face delivery and the use of technology in delivering postsecondary education.

II. ~~Procedures~~

AC. ~~Definitions~~

~~1. Distributed Learning – A learning environment in which the instructor serves as a designer of the learning environment rather than purveyor of information and in which the constraints of time and place are alleviated to facilitate the learner's access and autonomy.~~

~~2. Technology-Mediated Learning – Any form of instruction that uses an electronic system as a primary mode for creating the learning environment.~~

~~3. The advisory committee on distributed learning and mediated instruction shall be appointed by the commissioner and consist of representatives from the system campuses, the community colleges,~~

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~~and the commissioner's office. It will report to the academic and student affairs committee of the board through the council of academic officers and will be chaired by the distributed learning coordinator. The advisory committee will advise the commissioner and the system on policy and procedures related to distributed learning and on acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery and/or learning systems, and will assist in resolving concerns that might arise between the campuses.~~

- ~~1. Distance Education is defined as planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring specialized course design, instructional techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning are included in this definition.~~
- ~~2. Face-to-Face/Enhanced delivery is characterized when instruction occurs in a traditional classroom with face-to-face interaction between the instructor and students, at any local campus or remote site, and includes utilization of technology to enhance the class without reducing student seat-time.~~
- ~~3. Internet or Online delivery implies that 100% of the course section is offered completely online and delivered asynchronously, with no face-to-face interaction between instructors and students.~~
- ~~4. Video Conferencing is characterized by a course section offered through scheduled (synchronous) interactive video, including desktop conferencing.~~
- ~~5. Blended learning is designed specifically to be delivered partially online in an asynchronous format and partially through face-to-face (F2F) interaction, typically in the classroom. Both online and F2F interactions are required for the course. This delivery is characterized by the expectation of reduced F2F class meeting time when compared to the equivalent credit classroom course.~~
- ~~6. Other Distance Learning includes courses other than internet/online and interactive video, and may include correspondence courses, tape/DVD delivery, etc.~~

II. Reporting Procedures

~~A. The director of eLearning business will annually identify data elements involving online learning to be gathered on an annual basis, and will rely upon the use of these definitions in the gathering of data from the campuses and the MUS data warehouse. By September 15th of each year, the director shall file with the ARSA committee of the board, an annual report of online learning activity over the preceding fiscal year. The director will provide guidelines to the campuses for the format and content of this annual report, the web site presence of online programs will be updated at least annually, and the director will publish a compiled report on the MUS web site at <http://mus.edu/online>.~~

III. Mission

~~A. In accordance with regents' policy, each campus of the MUS shall have an approved mission statement on file with the office of commissioner of higher education.~~

~~B. All programs and courses offered by the respective campuses of the MUS shall be consistent with the approved campus mission statement.~~

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III.—Reporting Procedures

~~A. By July 1 of every year, each institution shall file with the commissioner an annual report of its distributed learning activity over the preceding twelve months. The distributed learning coordinator will provide guidelines for the format and content of this report and will publish an aggregated report on the worldwide web for public access.~~

~~B. The EAC serves as a formal conduit for campuses and OCHE to share technology interests, adaptations, uses, experiences for the purposes of judging and evaluating compatibility and possible multi-campus purchasing/licensing efficiencies that can be discussed and attained where feasible, as well as to offer periodic recommendations to the ARSA committee of the board, as needed.~~

~~B. For credit courses only, by April 15 for autumn semester, November 1 for spring semester, and March 1 for summer session of each fiscal year, each campus will file, with the distributed learning coordinator, a list of credit courses being offered via distributed learning methodologies according to the following criteria:~~

- ~~1. course number~~
- ~~2. course name~~
- ~~3. number of credits~~
- ~~4. term~~
- ~~5. medium(s) of delivery~~
- ~~6. site (where applicable).~~

~~C. For incidental courses where such a schedule is not practical, the campus will notify the coordinator and other campuses prior to advertising the offering. The distributed learning coordinator will publish a list of distributed learning courses on the MUS worldwide web for public access.~~

~~D. The distributed learning coordinator shall, with the assistance of the advisory committee, resolve scheduling conflicts among institutions concerning course and program delivery. Institutions may appeal such decisions to the commissioner.~~

~~E. Campuses considering the acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery systems and/or learning management systems to support technology-mediated learning or online course development and delivery for remote audiences should strive to select systems that are compatible with existing technology, and must submit proposals should provide timely notice of interest, product experience/evaluations, and potential acquisition to the to the ~~distributed learning coordinator~~ director of eLearning business for review by and discussion with the advisory committee ~~EAC~~ prior to purchase and implementation. Prior to purchases of other related distance learning technology, campuses are encouraged to share their desire for such technologies with the EAC.~~

IIIIV. Standards and Conditions

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~~A. Faculty training and development of courses or programs will follow the eight core principles of quality online course design as developed, adopted, and defined by the EAC, and which may be found at: <http://mus.edu/online/CorePrinciples0308.asp>.~~

- ~~1. Instructors responsible for credit courses offered through distributed learning methodologies must meet the standards used by the institution for the appointment of faculty including review and approval at the departmental level in the fields affected and other approvals as determined by each campus.~~
- ~~2. Procedures for evaluation of faculty responsible for credit courses offered through distributed learning must be equivalent to those used by the academic departments.~~
- ~~3. Whenever distributed learning permits the enrollment of substantially greater numbers of students in a course than would normally occur, the institution must provide technical and instructional assistance sufficient to ensure that quality is maintained.~~
- ~~4. To support faculty who are or wish to become involved in distributed learning, the campuses should provide support services to assist faculty in course development and/or updating skills as needed.~~

~~B. Each campus will ensure that students admitted to a course possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed in the course, and will provide aid to students who experience difficulty using the required technology. Students~~

- ~~1. Students who wish to enroll in programs offered through distributed learning must satisfy the same requirements for admission to the institution, to the program of which the course is a part, and to the course itself, as would be expected of students enrolling in the same program taught in the traditional on-campus manner. Students are responsible for compliance with individual campus policies related to enrollment and degree status.~~
- ~~2. For students who are located at remote sites and are enrolled in distributed learning courses or programs, the credit hours earned in such courses may be accepted toward the on-campus residency requirement for graduation if a student has completed the university's regular admissions process and has been admitted to degree-seeking status within nine (9) credit hours of the original enrollment.~~
- ~~3. Students enrolled in distributed learning programs must be provided with academic and student support services appropriate to the program and comparable to those provided other students in like programs, including academic advising, library and computer services, and financial aid services. These may be provided by technology-mediated methods when appropriate.~~

~~C. Each campus will be responsible for ensuring that its online web presence at the Montana university system web site is current and fully functional with respect to the posted web links, and will notify the director of eLearning business whenever updates are needed or web links are not functioning properly.~~

- ~~4. Students who are enrolled in distributed learning courses or programs and who are located at remote sites shall be assessed fees that are directly applicable to the delivery and support of the course or program for which they are enrolled. This will include tuition, a portion of the typical mandatory fees and any special fees for the mode of delivery that have been approved by the regents.~~
- ~~5. Mandatory fees that are not applicable to the distributed learning program will not be assessed. At least one month prior to course or program start-up, the campus shall file notice with the commissioner's office of those fees that are applicable to students at remote sites on a course or program basis.~~

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GD. Course-related content management and support

- ~~1. Standards and procedures for the regular evaluation of the organization and content of distributed learning courses must be equivalent to those used for resident instruction.~~
- ~~2. Standards for student success or failure in distributed learning courses must be as rigorous as those for traditional on-campus credit courses and communicated to the students at the beginning of the course.~~
- ~~3. Each course offered through distributed learning methodologies must include on-going procedures for monitoring and assessing student performance.~~
- ~~4. Each instructor of record in distributed learning courses must provide regular, timely feedback to students regarding their progress and performance and make him or herself available for consultation with students as necessary.~~
- 51. Copyright and intellectual property protection (see also BOR Policy 401.3)**
 - a. **Universities-Campuses** offering **technology-mediated distance education** courses shall ensure compliance with all applicable copyright laws governing the use and transmission of films, videotapes, recordings, performances and other protected works, as well as the reproduction of printed materials prior to the offering or transmission of the course.
 - b. **Universities-Campuses** offering **technology-mediated distance education** courses shall ensure compliance with all laws, as well as MUS or institutional policies relating to the protection of intellectual property prior to the offering or transmission of the course.

V. Fiscal Practices

~~A. State-subsidized FTE. Normally, distributed learning courses and programs will be funded by state appropriations under the approved FTE formulas in combination with a campus-resident and non-resident student tuition and approved fees as authorized by the board of regents.~~

- ~~1. Under the state-subsidized model, the instructor's salary and all related instructional costs may be funded from the FTE subsidy and student tuition and fees collected.~~
- ~~2. Extraordinary credit course fees associated with the costs of technology-mediated course delivery may be requested from the board of regents in advance, normally in May of each year.~~
- ~~3. Student credit hours generated under this funding arrangement (both resident and non-resident) are reported annually to the office of commissioner of higher education for inclusion in the MUS legislative budget report.~~

~~B. Restricted enrollment model. Under special circumstances, universities may propose to offer a distributed learning degree or degree-completion program to students at remote sites on a restricted-fund or self-sustaining basis, i.e. with all funding derived exclusively from tuition and fees authorized by the board of regents from sponsoring organizations via grants or contracts, or from other non-state sources of funding.~~

- ~~1. Prior to advertising restricted enrollment or self-sustaining program(s), the campus will file with the distributed learning coordinator a written proposal indicating what course or program is planned and why the self-sustaining funding is preferable.~~

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~~2. Under the restricted enrollment or self-sustaining model, all salaries and course expenses must be funded from sources outside the institution's state-appropriated operating budget.~~

~~3. All student credit hours generated by technology-mediated courses and programs offered under the restricted enrollment or self-sustaining model must be reported separately from those generated under state funding and are not eligible for state subsidy.~~

~~C. In either instance (noted in 1 or 2 above), all versions of distributed learning program(s) shall be offered under the same financing plan at all sites during any single fiscal year.~~

History:

Item 60-004-R0788, Telecommunication Instruction Policy, November 4, 1988; as revised March 25, 1999. Item 152-132-R0911, revised September 22, 2011.