The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley
Division of Academic Affairs

Policy for the Design and Delivery of Distance Education Courses and Programs

1 Introduction

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley is committed to maintaining the highest standards of excellence regardless of the course delivery format. The purpose of this policy is to provide definitions, expectations, and support for the design and delivery of online, hybrid and web-augmented courses and programs.

2 Definitions

Distance Education: According to Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (*THECB*), "the formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (*more than 50 percent*) of instruction."

Distance Education Course: THECB defines it as "a course in which a majority (*more than 50 percent*) of the instruction occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are not in the same place." In accordance with THECB, there are two types of distance education courses: fully distance education courses and hybrid/blended course.

Fully Distance Education Course: This is one type of distance education course. THECB defines the type of the course as "a course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time." According to THECB, "examples of face-to-face sessions include orientation, laboratory, exam review, or an in-person test."

Hybrid/Blended Course: This is one type of distance education course. THECB defines this type of distance education course as "a course in which a majority (*more than 50 percent but less than 85 percent*), of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place."

Web-Augmented Course: This distance education course is defined as a course in which a *more than 25 percent but less than 50 percent* of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place."

Returning Course: A returning course is defined as a course that will be offered, but has previously reviewed, approved and taught in an online, hybrid or web-augmented delivery mode.

Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program: According to THECB, this is defined as a program in which a student may complete a majority (*more than 50 percent*) of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses."

Faculty Member: An instructor of record responsible for teaching a particular academic course, regardless of academic rank, (e. g., professor, associate professor, assistant professor or lecturer).

Program Coordinator: Faculty member responsible for ensuring that academic program contains essential curricular components, has appropriate content and pedagogy and maintains currency in the field.

Teaching Online Certification: Quality Matters and Blackboard Learning Management System Certification offered by the Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technologies.

Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology (COLTT): The Academic Affairs support unit that assists faculty and assures quality in the design, development, and delivery of online and hybrid courses.

3   Qualifications and Expectations from Faculty

Faculty members must be certified to teach distance education courses. Any faculty member who wishes to teach an online, hybrid or web-augmented course is required to complete the following certification:

Title	Offered by	Duration	Cost
Quality Matters	Center for Online Learning & Teaching Technologies (COLTT)	2-week online 8-hours face-to-face	Covered by COLTT

In addition, faculty members with no history on teaching online or hybrid courses are required to complete the Technology Course listed below:

Title	Offered by	Duration	Cost
Blackboard	Center for Online Learning & Teaching Technologies (COLTT)	4-hours face-to-face	None

The Faculty Certification is valid for a three year period. After the third year, faculty must be recertified based on the current edition of the Quality Matters Rubric.

Faculty who is not certified but currently teaching hybrid or online courses shall complete the certification process during the next immediate certification session available.

Note: If a faculty member already has a QM Rubric certification from another university, he/she is exempt from completing the certification mentioned above. If faculty possess another distance   education

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certification, he/she must provide documentation to be evaluated by the Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology.

Faculty members (Subject Matter Experts) have the primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum of the distance education course.

Faculty members who teach distance education courses are responsible for acquiring the skills necessary to effectively design, develop, and delivery course-related material, and to engage students in the course on a regular basis.

4   University Commitment

Distance education at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley adheres to the following policies and best practices:

- SACSCOC policy statement for *Distance and Correspondence Education*
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board *Approval of Distance Education, including Off- Campus Courses and Programs*
- *Principles of Good Practice* as defined by the Southern Regional Education Board for the Electronic Campus (SREC) and the THECB
- Quality Matters *Rubric*

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley through the Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology provides training and other professional development opportunities to enhance the additional skills required for faculty members teaching distance education courses. The professional development incorporates best practices and technology tools often used in distance education.

Learning objectives of a specific course should be consistent across delivery formats.

5   Distance Education Possibilities

UTRGV continues to increase educational opportunities by creating new programs, both online and face-to-face. Another possibility includes the change of the delivery mode from existing face-to-face courses and programs to an online, hybrid or web-augmented delivery mode. Below is a list of possibilities that includes quality assurance in the process.

- Change existing face-to-face program to an online program (traditional 16 week-online or accelerated 7 week-online)
- Change existing face-to-face course to an online, hybrid or web-augmented course
- Returning online, hybrid or web-augmented course
- New online programs

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6 Process

A. <u>Online Programs</u> – Existing (existing face-to-face program to *traditional 16 week-online or accelerated 7 week-online programs*)

1. Institutional Approval: Existing programs that wish to transition to a traditional online format or an accelerated online program must obtain approval from the Undergraduate Committee or Graduate Committee to deliver the program online in order to meet The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board requirements for peer review of alternative delivery of coursework

2. UT System Notification: The Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (undergraduate programs) or Executive Vice President for Research, Graduate Studies, and New Program Development (graduate programs) will request approval from UT System to offer programs in an online format in coordination with the Office of Institutional Accreditation and Office of Academic and Institutional Excellence.

3. THECB Notification: The Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology will coordinate with Academic Affairs by submitting the program into the THECB Distance Education Portal.

4. Effective Online Teaching: To ensure consistency and quality in online learning, Academic Affairs and COLTT have implemented a continuous quality improvement process (*Blueprinting Process*) designated to ensure that online programs are designed, developed and implemented with high-quality standards and exemplary academic rigor.

5. Blueprinting Process for Online Programs (*See attached Blueprinting Process Agreement. Agreement must be signed by Dean, Chair and Program Coordinator & COLTT Director*).

   BP Process:
   - Meet with Dean, School Director/Department Chair, and Program Coordinator
   - Meet with all participating faculty
   - Agree on the process and sign Blueprinting Process agreement
   - Agree on the process and sign Course Development Agreement
   - Start course development process
   - Align goals and SLOs at Program and Course Level
   - Certify faculty on Quality Matters (QM)
   - Develop courses

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- Internal reviews (*2*)
- Course offered for two terms
- Submit course to QM for review

B. <u>Online, Hybrid, and Web-Augmented Courses – Existing (existing face-to-face course to an online, hybrid or web-augmented course)</u>:

Requirements

All online, hybrid, and web-augmented courses taught at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley must be reviewed and approved by COLTT before the course is offered in order to ensure that it meets the quality standard guidelines.

COLTT will assign an Instructional Designer to guide faculty in the design and development of the online, hybrid and web-augmented course.

Online, Hybrid and Web-Augmented Course must be fully developed and approved by COLTT before the first day of classes.

Faculty teaching a new online, hybrid and web-augmented must be assigned to the course with a minimum of four months' lead-time so that the course can be completely developed prior to the first day of classes.

Major development of new online, hybrid and web-augmented courses should not be ongoing during the semester that course is offered.

Faculty members (Subject Matter Experts) have the primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum of the course.

Faculty and Instructional Designer will agree on a timeline to design, develop, and review the course.

Faculty will be required to give Instructional Designer access to the course for review.

In the case that the course does not meet the minimum Quality Matters requirements or is not fully developed within the time frame, the course will be rescheduled to be offered online, hybrid or web-augmented for the following semester.

C. Returning Online, Hybrid and Web-Augmented Courses:

Requirements

All returning online, hybrid and web-augmented courses must be reviewed and approved by COLTT before the course is offered to ensure that the course meets quality standard guidelines.

COLTT will assign an Instructional Designer to guide faculty with updates for the returning online, hybrid and web-augmented course.

The review and update process for existing online, hybrid and web-augmented courses is carried out by the Faculty in conjunction with COLTT. The assigned Instructional Designer will provide feedback to the faculty member based on the recommendations from the Quality Matters Rubric. The intent of the review process for existing online, hybrid and web-augmented courses is to provide faculty with constructive feedback for course improvement and quality assurance.

Online, Hybrid or Web-Augmented Course must be updated, if necessary, and approved by COLTT before the first day of classes.

Faculty teaching a returning online, hybrid and web-augmented courses must be assigned to the course with a minimum of four weeks' time to update the course content prior to the first day of classes.

Any course modification made during the semester course is offered shall meet the requirements of QM and Accessibility Standards

Faculty members (Subject Matter Experts) continues to be the primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum of the course.

Faculty and Instructional Designer will agree on a timeline to update and review the course.

Faculty will be required to give Instructional Designer access to the course for review.

In the case that the course does not meet the minimum Quality Matters requirements or is not fully updated within the time frame, the course will be rescheduled to be offered online, hybrid or web-augmented for the following semester.

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D. Online Programs - New

1. New programs receiving initial approval to be delivered in an online format do not need additional Institutional approval or UT System approval.

2. If the program was not proposed to be delivered online, Institutional approval, UT System approval and THECB approval must be obtained following the procedures outlined in A. above.

3. Effective Online Teaching: To ensure consistency and quality in online learning, AA & COLTT have institutionalized a continuous quality improvement process (*Blueprinting Process*) designated to ensure that online programs are designed, developed and implemented with high-quality standards and exemplary academic rigor. Blueprinting Process for Online Programs (*See attached Blueprinting Process Agreement. Agreement must be signed by Dean, Chair and Program Coordinator & COLTT Director*).

   Process:
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   - Develop courses
   - Internal reviews (*2*)
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