

04.03 Distance Education

Original Approval: **DATE**

Last Updated: **DATE**

Last Reviewed: **DATE**

Policy / Purpose:

It is the policy of Wallace Community College – Selma (WCCS) to comply with Alabama Community College System (ACCS), National Council of State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement (NC-SARA), U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) as it relates to distance education.

Scope:

This policy applies to all WCCS students and employees during any activity involving the College, including the workday. In addition, visitors, vendors, contractors, and all other non-employees are expected to recognize and comply with College policies.

Definitions:

Distance Education: Distance education at WCCS is defined as 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 physical location. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course at WCCS is any course in which students may complete fifty percent (50%) or more of the requirements through the College's learning management system. Distance education courses at WCCS may be classified as Online, Hybrid Online, or HyFlex. Traditional courses are not classified as distance education courses.

Methods of Delivery: The methods of delivery for these learning formats are defined below:

- a. *Online:* Online courses are delivered asynchronously. There are no required face-to-face sessions within the course and no requirements for on-campus activity. Faculty interact with students through assignments, discussion posts, email, office hours and other electronic/virtual means. Identity verification will be required using the college's approved verification process
- b. *Hybrid Online:* Courses require a combination of online and in-person activities, with more than 50% of the course content requiring online interaction. Some elements will have specified days, times, and locations when attendance is expected. Identity verification will be required using the college's approved verification process.
- c. *HyFlex:* HyFlex courses feature highly flexible course delivery models that offer students multiple options for receiving instruction and participating in course activities. These may include a mix of face-to-face, online, virtual, and/or videoconference. Available options may vary by course and by instructor and are subject to local college policy. Students should inquire about expectations for participation/attendance before registering for a HyFlex course. Identity verification for students participating on line may be required using the college's approved verification process.
- d. *Correspondence Education:* Correspondence education is a formal educational process

under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced.

Details:

1. Distance Education Policy Statements:

- a. **Identification of Students:** WCCS does not charge any additional fees for the costs that may be directly incurred with the verification of student identity for students enrolled in distance education courses. However, students enrolled in distance education courses will be required to present a valid photo ID (WCCS ID, state issued ID or driver's license, passport, or military ID) and have access to a computer with a microphone, webcam capabilities, and Internet access verified during the first week of a course. This may result in direct costs to the student not imposed by the College.
- b. **Password Protection:** All courses with electronic content are password protected and each student enrolled in the course is given a username and password to the learning management system.
- c. **Student Privacy:** Annually, WCCS informs students of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. This Act, with which the institution fully complies, was designed to protect the privacy of education records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their education records, and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Also, students have the right to file complaints with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Office (FERPA) concerning alleged failures by the institution to comply with the Act. Questions concerning the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act may be referred to the **ADD OFFICE NAME HERE**.

In order to protect the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs, the instructor will not publicly post any grades or personal information for any student.

Grades must be posted securely, visible only by each individual student, in his/her password-protected student grade book.

To further protect the privacy of students, all instructors must contact students using the secure communication system in the learning management system or through the College provided email accounts for both students and instructors. Students can view their entire communication history in their learning management system inbox. As with any other password protected email account, other individuals cannot access or view the message history.

- d. **Reporting Enrollment:** WCCS reports accurate headcount enrollment on its annual Institutional Profile to SACSCOC. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, requires that institutions that participate in federal student aid programs report data on enrollments, program completions, graduation rates, instructors and staff, finances, institutional prices, and student financial aid. These data are made available to students and parents through the College's website and to researchers

and others through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center.

- e. **Intellectual Property Rights:** All materials developed by WCCS instructors are the property of WCCS and are subject to revision by individual instructors teaching the courses.
- f. **Copyright:** Instructors teaching distance education courses are expected refer to and follow the College's Copyright, Trademark, and Patent Ownership Policy.
- g. **Accreditation:** Distance and correspondence education courses and programs at WCCS comply with the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation*.

2. Distance and Correspondence Program Review Activities:

a. Accountability for the Delivery and Quality of Programs:

- 1) **Course Delivery:** Accountability for the delivery of courses is centralized through the authority of the **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE**.
 - i) The **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE** requires instructors to complete a 6-week training course for an internal distance education certification and a series of tasks each semester to maintain accountability for course delivery.
 - ii) Supporting documentation housed by the instructional departments includes:
 - Getting Started Guide
 - LMS Basics for minimum course requirements
 - Instructional Procedures and Course Review Checklist
 - iii) The **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE** verifies minimum requirements for each course as:
 - Home Page
 - Syllabus
 - Syllabus Quiz
 - Gradebook
 - Frequent Grading
 - Navigational Links
 - Grading Scheme
 - Course Availability
 - Weekly Activities
 - Frequent Feedback
 - Due Dates
- 2) **Course Quality:**
 - i) Accountability for the quality of courses is decentralized.
 - ii) Academic departments are responsible for their respective course content and quality.

- iii) Instructors serve as subject matter experts and lead instructors on curriculum teams. The curriculum teams consist of subject matter experts (full-time or part-time instructors), a lead instructor, and instructional design support.

b. Program Delivery and Quality:

- 1) Accountability for delivery and quality of programs are centralized through the Program Review Committee.
- 2) Supporting documentation for program reviews are housed by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and consists of the following:
 - The Program Review Process
 - The Program Review Template

c. Scope of the Program: WCCS's scope of distance education programs is delivered through the learning management system delivery platform. The learning activities conducted through the learning management system are accessed and performed at remote locations at which the students are geographically located.

d. The Extent of Course Work/Programs:

- Distance education courses go through an initial course review process (as outlined in the Curriculum and Instruction section of this policy) conducted by the Distance Education Sub-Committee.
- Upon the course review, the sub-committee verifies which programs the course is part of to determine the percentage of delivery through distance education delivery modes.

e. Access to Information Regarding the Programs: Access to information provided by the institution regarding program review activities can be found through the College's internal accreditation and compliance management software. This information is housed under the supervision of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

2. Distance Education Mission, Structure, and Institutional Effectiveness:

a. Distance Education Mission Statement: **ADD MISSION STATEMENT HERE.**

b. Organizational Structure: Administrative responsibility for all educational programs, including the offering of distance education courses and programs, is reflected in the organizational structure of the institution. All distance education courses and programs are developed and approved by the same instructor and instructional design curriculum teams that develop and approve traditional courses and programs for the institution. The **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE** is aligned within the organizational chart under the oversight of the Dean of Instruction and works at a departmental level with all areas of instruction and student services to develop and approve courses, programs, and services for distance education delivery methods.

c. Institutional Effectiveness: The College maintains overall effectiveness and quality in distance education through a variety of processes.

- 1) **Standard Course Syllabi:** The College uses standard course syllabi for both its

traditional and distance education classes. While additional instructions and/or directions may be necessary for distance education classes, the course syllabus, grading structure, textbook, and student learning outcomes remain the same regardless of the method of delivery.

- 2) **Professional Development:** Professional development is required for all instructors teaching a distance education course. Professional development workshops cover both pedagogy and skills in the use of technology.
- 3) **Student Evaluations:** Feedback from students using the College's standard course/instructor evaluation form is also used to maintain overall effectiveness and quality. These forms are distributed electronically to the students and provide useful feedback for the improvement of distance education courses.
- 4) **Peer Review and Approval:** The College requires a peer review and approval process for all proposed distance education courses before they are offered to the students. The process is detailed in the Instructors Oversight section of this Distance Education Policy. Prior to the commencement of the peer review process, the Division Chair must review the course curriculum. After the Division Chair reviews the proposed course, said course must then pass a committee peer review process that includes approval of the course structure and instructional media to be used in the course. Finally, following the ultimate approval based on the distance education rubric score, the course is offered in a distance learning mode of delivery.

Given the aforementioned methods of evaluation, the College ensures the overall effectiveness and quality of courses taught via the distance learning process.

3. Distance Education Curriculum and Instruction:

- a. **Instructor Oversight:** At WCCS, distance education has been integrated into many different programs as additional modes of instructional delivery to assist in accomplishing the College's current goals, objectives, and planning and evaluation processes. An integral part of the planning and approval process for distance education at WCCS is the Distance Education Sub-Committee. This sub-committee is composed of instructors from a variety of academic and technical divisions and staff members from a variety of academic and student support departments throughout the College. The charge of the committee is to review distance education policies and procedures as well as distance education courses. Courses are reviewed based on a criteria rubric prior to the courses being offered in a distance education format.

Proposed distance education courses are approved in accordance with the steps listed below:

- 1) **Distance Education Course Request Form:** An internal request for a course to be offered in a distance education format must be submitted to the requestor's Division Chairperson. The agreement for request must be approved by applicable Division Chairs. The requesting Division Chairperson submits the official **ADD FORM NAME HERE**.
- 2) **Master Template Creation:** The proposed course is checked for distance

education program of study percentage to determine the impact of each course on a program of study's overall distance education percentage. A master template is created in the LMS for the curriculum team (relevant full-time and part-time instructors and instructional design staff). Based on program of study percentage, the course request could be referred for approval to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The curriculum team begins building a course template based on the criteria specified in the rubric and course creation checklist.

3) Course Review Process:

- i) Review and approval of the completely developed electronic course must be completed by the Distance Education Sub-Committee using the applicable rubric and scoring process.
 - ii) The curriculum team and applicable Division Chairs will receive a copy of the committee's feedback and approval, recommendations prior to approval, or denial. The curriculum team is responsible for making any necessary changes or corrections to the master template.
 - iii) Documentation of course approvals are submitted to the Curriculum Committee for notification.
- b. **Proctoring:** A proctored assessment is defined as an examination, assignment, or other verbal assessment of work that is taken in the presence of the instructor, an approved proctor, or via video recording. Proctoring procedures help provide accurate student identity verification. Pursuant to 34 CFR 602.17 (g) and (h):
- (g) Requires institutions to have processes in place through which the institution establishes that a student who registers in any course offered via distance education or correspondence is the same student who academically engages in the course or program; and*
- (h) Makes clear in writing that institutions must use processes that protect student privacy and notify students of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.*
- The institution will demonstrate that the student who registers in a distance education course is the same student who participates in and completes the course and receives the credit by verifying the identity of the student who participates in the course during the first week of the course and through proctored assessments.
- c. **Regular and Substantive Interaction:** Pursuant to 34 CFR §600.2 in the definition of distance education, substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment relative to the course content. Substantive activities include but are not limited to the following:
- Providing direct instruction.
 - Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework.
 - Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course.
 - Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course.

Regular interaction between students and instructors and among students occurs prior to the student's completion of the course. Regular interactions with and among students occur on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course. Instructors monitor student academic engagement and success promptly and proactively.

- d. **Accessibility:** Section 508 of Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 states in part, "Electronic information and data must be equally accessible to individuals with and without disabilities." In building online course materials, it is important to bear in mind that as a public college receiving federal funding, WCCS is required to meet Section 508 standards for web-based information. Conforming to these standards requires that materials that could potentially pose problems for students with disabilities need to be altered to accommodate full access. Instructors are responsible for ensuring that their courses are in compliance with this federal law.
- e. **Instructional Technology:** WCCS uses a learning management system, coordinated by the **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE**, under the direction of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). This system and other technologies utilized by the College provides flexibility to deliver instructional content and assessment for distance education courses.

All instructors teaching distance education courses are required to provide a course overview that includes course navigation and other technical information as required for the course. Instructors are required to provide contact information to students. Additionally, instructors have access to an electronic messaging system between the students and instructors. In the event that students cannot access their courses, they may contact the **Technology Services Help Desk**.

All WCCS distance education courses must use the learning management system to record grades for all assignments in a timely manner for students to access.

- f. **Program Length and Courses of Study:** All programs, regardless of method of delivery, adhere to equivalent program length and courses of study as defined by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS).
- g. **Credit Awarded:** For all courses offered through distance or correspondence education, WCCS employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded and justifies the use of a unit other than semester credit hours by explaining its equivalency as outlined in the College Catalog.
- h. **Consortia Arrangements and Contractual Agreements:** When entering into consortia arrangements or contractual agreements for the delivery of courses/programs or services offered by distance or correspondence education, WCCS ensures the effectiveness and quality of the courses/programs offered by all of the participants by using standard student learning outcomes, program review processes, and instructor evaluations.
- i. **Instructors:** WCCS has adequate instructor resources to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs. Division Chairs work within their respective divisions to provide a workload rotation of various methods of delivery. Distance education courses and traditional courses have the same semester credit hours and

are counted equally when determining instructors' workloads.

WCCS evaluates instructors teaching distance education courses and traditional courses based on the same evaluation procedures and criteria.

Instructors who teach distance education programs and courses receive appropriate ongoing training on the learning management system, affiliated technologies, and instructional and pedagogical strategies.

- j. **Policy on Equivalence:** Courses taught in a distance education format are equivalent to the courses taught in the traditional format, in accordance with SACSCOC requirements. All curriculum developed by the instructors and instructional design curriculum teams is planned based on a map that aligns with the course learning objectives and is designed to meet credit hour and/or contact hour requirements for the course delivery.

4. **Distance Education Student Services and Resources:**

- a. **Instructional Support Services:** In order to promote the student learning experience and enhance student development, students are assigned advisors. Students are able to receive the individualized attention needed to launch their academic careers and remain on track to reach their respective goals.

Advisors may meet with students during business hours or at other pre-arranged times. All advisors may be contacted by telephone, e-mail, or through online communication. To further bolster the College's academic advising program, students are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Advising Department. Specific campus locations and office hours are listed on the WCCS website. These staff members can help students obtain their educational goals through a collaborative effort. They assist students in choosing majors and planning programs of study to meet their goals. Finally, through the use of the College website, social media sites, and other technologies, advisors communicate with all students regarding academic advising and other student services as needed.

- b. **Library and Learning Resources:** The WCCS Library provides an array of services to meet the educational needs of all students at the College. The WCCS Libraries provide extensive online collections to meet the information needs of distance education students. All students have access to specialized databases provided by the College to meet the specific needs of each discipline and to the Alabama Virtual Library (a service provided by Alabama to all citizens and students in Alabama). Students have 24/7 access to the online library collections via a Library Services course within Canvas, the learning management system, which provides links to all databases as well as library instruction guides.

Libraries provide appropriate study facilities, access to trained staff capable of assisting with research, and serve as campus centers for continued learning and engagement. The Library provides access to books from across the College's library system, as well as magazines, periodicals, and reference resources to meet the course needs of any subject taught at the College. Distance education students may request that books and other physical materials be emailed or mailed to the Library, or to their homes, so that all collections are available to all students. Desktop and

laptop computers are accessible in each physical location, as well as Wi-Fi, copiers, and meeting areas. All locations have a limited number of laptops available for semester-long checkout to further support distance education students. All locations provide flexible hours of operation to meet the needs of each campus.

- c. **Student Services:** Students at WCCS receive a variety of services designed specifically for eligible students, including individualized tutoring, individual and group advising sessions, academic advising, financial aid assistance, educational and cultural field trip services, and specialized services needed by the individual student, through the Student Support Services Program, as found in the [College Catalog](#) and Student Handbook.

Services through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 are provided through the ADA Coordinator. These services are also in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The College's ADA Program is designed to ensure that students with disabilities have the programmatic and architectural access needed for successful integration into college life. Students with disabilities are provided with the "Criteria for Disability Documentation," which was adopted by the Alabama Community College System and implemented by all institutions within the System. Also, students are provided with the steps for filing an ADA grievance, which is contained in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy. Records of accommodations, documentations, and requests for accommodations made by students with disabilities are maintained confidentially in the ADA Coordinator Office.

WCCS recognizes that in order to efficiently and effectively carry out its mission, and to maintain a climate that is conducive to its effective and efficient operation, its students must feel confident that any valid complaint or grievance a student may make concerning the College will be promptly addressed by the appropriate personnel. Refer to the Student - Formal Complaints Policy, which defines the procedures for resolving such complaints and grievances which have been adopted by WCCS.

The College's pathway list can be found on the College's website in the College Catalog. The degree plans and pathways detailed in the College Catalog reflect the degree requirements and specific admission requirements for each program of study the College offers. Students are able to quickly see what courses are needed to complete a specific program or pathway. Student services, including student organizations, student assistance programs, and opportunities to enhance students' college experiences, are featured on the College's website and in the [College Catalog](#) and Student Handbook.

In accordance with ACCS [Board Policy 801.01](#), it is the intent of the [Board] that any individual who has satisfied the admission requirements be admitted to an ACCS institution. The Board acknowledges that individual programs or courses may have additional, specific prerequisites or admission requirements as specified by program of study in the [College Catalog](#) and Student Handbook.

- d. **Technical Security and Support:** The security of personal information is protected in the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results through the password protected learning management system coordinated by the **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE**, under the license of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). Refer to the Technology Services and Network Access Policy

for procedures regarding User Access/Password Assignment and Confidentiality.

- e. **Facilities and Finances:** For all courses, including distance learning courses, all students have access to the College's learning management system. LMS support is coordinated by the **ADD DEPARTMENT NAME HERE**, under the direction of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) who licenses 24/7 support access to the learning management system for employees and students to receive assistance with learning management technical support issues. In the event that a student does not have adequate Internet access from their home and lives within the College's service area, the College is equipped to provide access to course curriculum from any of the College's locations.

The College provides adequate funding for instructors, staff, services, and technological infrastructure to support the methodology of Distance Education through annual budget reviews and strategic planning for Distance Education. The budget is scalable as student enrollment and needs for services increase.

Procedure(s):

1. Procedures within this policy are referenced in the Details sections above.

Additional Provisions / Information

There are no additional provisions / information applicable to this policy.