

Guidelines for UAA Distance Education Courses

The following are guidelines for developing distance education courses and are not part of the Graduate Academic Board or the Undergraduate Academic Board approval process. The guidelines are based on national standards broadly agreed upon by a range of national education organizations and universities. The purpose of these recommendations (which are designed to apply to all the UAA campuses) is to ensure that the quality of distance-delivered courses at the University of Alaska Anchorage is acceptably high in terms of instructional delivery, "classroom" experience, and learning outcomes.

Keep in mind that the following guidelines are *suggested recommendations*. They are not meant to dictate behavior or to limit freedom when it comes to the delivery and instruction of distance education courses. Instead, they are designed to suggest a course of action for strengthening the quality of learning and the quality of experience associated with distance education at UAA.

For the purposes of this document, distance education is defined as follows:

"Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organizational and administrative arrangements." *Moore, M. G. & Kearsley, G. (1996). Distance education: A systems view. Washington: Wadsworth Publishing.*

Guidelines for Institutional Support Services

- The institution shall provide faculty and students access to reliable and appropriate technologies for carrying out the instructional goals of distance education courses (this includes a stable, password-protected learning platform for e-learning).
- The institution shall provide faculty and students appropriate levels of training and/or training materials related to the use of distance education technologies.
- The institution shall provide and/or administer a "pre-course assessment form" that asks students to indicate their preparedness for taking a distance education course (preparedness in terms of skills, access to required technologies, and learning styles).

- The institution shall provide distance education faculty and students access to a centralized technical support center that will provide timely assistance on technology questions and problems.
- The institution shall provide a course coding system that will allow instructors and departments to flag specific courses as distance-delivered courses in published course schedule offerings.
- The institution shall provide distance education faculty and students electronic access to library services, materials, and resources.
- The institution shall ensure that distance education students have adequate access to the following key administrative and support services: enrollment services, financial aid services, book store services, advising and counseling services, and disability support services.
- The institution shall provide students with timely information on the technical equipment and skills required for success in the different kinds of distance education courses offered at UAA. This includes information on how to log in to the university's primary course management system (e.g., Blackboard).
- The institution shall provide a centralized organization/department that is responsible for coordinating, implementing, and overseeing the major support services applicable to distance education students and faculty.

Guidelines for Student Support Services

- UAA students shall be made aware of the major technologies used in the course before the start of the course.
- UAA students shall be made aware of the minimum technical equipment and skill requirements of the course before the start of the course.
- UAA students shall be provided with a comprehensive course syllabus by the first day of the start of the course (note: if required textbook information is only available to the student through the course syllabus, then this document should be distributed to students in advance of the course start date).
- UAA students shall be made aware of all required synchronous (i.e., "real time") activities as well as their dates and times with as much advanced notice as possible (preferably two weeks before the event date).
- UAA students shall be granted frequent (and free) access to technical "help desk" services for the duration of the course.

- UAA students shall have a defined means of voicing complaints about courses to appropriate departments and deans.
- UAA students shall have reasonable access to enrollment services, financial aid services, book store services, advising and counseling services, disability support services, and library services.
- UAA students shall be provided access to training materials related to the course technologies when and where appropriate.

Guidelines for Faculty Support Services

- UAA faculty shall have access to instructional design support services (i.e., a course development team) to ensure the sound planning and approved quality of distance education courses.
- UAA faculty shall have access to training workshops and mentoring opportunities that will assist faculty in learning how to teach at a distance and how to translate face-to-face courses for distance delivery.
- UAA faculty shall be provided with incentives to participate in distance education course development training opportunities and technical training opportunities offered by the institution.
- UAA faculty shall be provided appropriate and reasonable access to new technologies and technical equipment for use in distance education instruction.
- UAA faculty shall be granted convenient (and free) access to technical “help desk” services.
- UAA distance education faculty shall have convenient (and free) access to centralized distance education course delivery services such as homework collection, materials duplication and distribution, exam proctoring, content digitization, etc.
- UAA faculty shall receive assistance in researching and interpreting current copyright law on the use of published and non-published instructional materials.
- UAA faculty shall receive assistance from library personnel in obtaining and organizing online and print library resources.

Guidelines for Course Content & Course Delivery

- UAA faculty shall assume full responsibility for the oversight and quality of distance education courses; this includes full responsibility for the selection and design of

course content, course activities, and course assessments; the selection and use of appropriate course technologies; the facilitation of course activities and course interactions; the evaluation of course assignments and tests; etc.

- UAA faculty shall ensure that the major tasks and learning outcomes of a given distance education course are comparable to the major tasks and learning outcomes of the course's face-to-face counterpart.
- UAA faculty shall ensure that all course materials, course requirements, course links, course policies, etc. are revised and up to date by the first day of the start of the course.
- UAA faculty shall ensure that distance education students have access to a copy of the course syllabus by the first day of the start of the course (note: if syllabus content is needed before the start of the course, then it shall be provided at an earlier time as the instructor sees fit). In addition to standard items such as "course objectives" and "course grading protocols," the syllabus should contain information particularly relevant to distance education, such as
 - course access information
 - course format and pacing
 - course technologies
 - course equipment requirements
 - technical skill requirements
 - book purchasing information
 - IT Call Center information
 - library access information
 - required synchronous activities
 - assignment submission instructions, etc.

(For more information, please view a copy of the CAS Distance Education Course Syllabus Template at the following address:
<http://uaaonline.alaska.edu/faculty/courseDev/documents/CASSyllabusTemplate.rtf>)

- UAA faculty shall give distance education students at least two reliable methods of contacting the course instructor throughout the semester (e.g., email, discussion board, telephone, in-person meeting, online chat room, etc.).
- UAA faculty shall respond to student questions and inquiries within a timely manner (preferably within two working days).
- UAA faculty shall provide useful and corrective feedback on assignments, tests, papers, and activities in a timely manner (preferably within seven working days).
- UAA faculty shall build mechanisms into their distance education courses that foster student-to-student interactions as well as student-to-instructor interactions.

- UAA faculty shall adopt teaching strategies and course design strategies that will verify a given student's work as his/her own. UAA faculty shall attempt to address different learning styles in the design and development of course materials and activities.
- UAA faculty shall assess student learning through multiple means rather than relying solely on the use of standardized tests.
- UAA faculty shall provide students with advance notice of required synchronous activities.
- UAA faculty shall ensure that borrowed print and electronic materials are used in accordance with current copyright law.
- UAA faculty shall carefully assess and review third party courseware (e.g, publishers' course cartridges, telecourse tapes, etc.) before integrating such content into a given course.
- UAA faculty shall assess distance education courses through formal means (e.g, peer review, student review, departmental review, etc.) to ensure that appropriate learning outcomes are being met.
- UAA faculty shall ensure that course content is accessible to students with disabilities when and where appropriate. This may include presenting material in alternative formats, such as printable text files.

Guidelines for Student Participation

- UAA students shall take the initiative to learn about the technical equipment and technical skill requirements for the course in advance of the course start date.
- UAA students shall be advised to complete a university-sponsored "pre-course assessment form" in which they are asked to indicate their preparedness for taking a distance education course (preparedness in terms of skills, access to required technologies, and learning styles).
- UAA students shall be advised that an instructor may drop a student from a course if he/she is unable to demonstrate the necessary technical skills for the class.
- UAA students shall adhere to the UAA Student Code of Conduct.
- UAA students shall use their UAA email account for the duration of the distance education course and shall be responsible for checking it on a frequent basis (preferably every two working days).

- UAA students shall respond to instructor-initiated emails and inquiries within a timely manner (preferably within two working days).
- UAA students shall demonstrate participation in a given distance education course within the first three weeks of the class or become immediately eligible for an instructor-initiated drop/withdrawal (note: some instructors may make exceptions to this policy for self-paced courses and other courses with alternative formats).
- UAA students shall be advised that frequent participation in a distance education course (e.g., completing assignments, responding to emails, posting messages, accessing course content, taking course exams, etc.) is a requirement for most classes. Therefore, failure to participate in a course for three weeks in a row will make a student eligible for an instructor-initiated drop/withdraw (note: some instructors may make exceptions to this policy for self-paced courses and other courses with alternative formats).
- UAA students shall take the time to complete and submit the university-sponsored course evaluation form made available to them at the end of the semester.

Works Consulted

American Federation of Teachers (2000). "Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice."

http://www.aft.org/higher_ed/downloadable/distance.pdf

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. "Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs."

http://www.neasc.org/cihe/best_practices_electronically_offered_degree.htm

Institute for Higher Education Policy (2000). "Quality on the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education."

<http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Quality.pdf>

North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (2000). "Guidelines for Distance Education."

<http://www.ncacihe.org/resources/guidelines/gdistance.html>

Oregon State University (2002). "Course Quality Standards."

<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/coursedev/models/id/standards.htm>

University of Wisconsin System (2000). "Distance Ed Standards for Academic and Student Support Services: Guidelines for Distance Education Credit Program Array and Approval." <http://www.uwsa.edu/acadaff/acis/destandards.pdf>