

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

1. Introduction

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) is committed to maintaining the highest standards of excellence regardless of the format of course or program delivery. 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: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rules define distance education as the “formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are in separate physical locations for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction.”

Distance Education Course: A course in which a majority (more than 50 percent) of the instruction occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. The definition of a distance education course does not include courses with less than 50% of instruction occurring when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. Coordinating Board rules recognize two categories of distance education courses: 100-percent online courses and hybrid courses.

100-percent online course: THECB defines a 100% online course as a “distance education course in which 100 percent of instructional activity takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. Requirements for on-campus or in-person orientation, testing, academic support services, internships/fieldwork, or other non-instructional activities do not exclude a course from this category.”

Hybrid Course: THECB defines a Hybrid Course as a “distance education course in which more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of instructional activity takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations.”

Online Asynchronous Course: An online asynchronous course is one in which there are no scheduled real-time interactions with the instructor. Students access course materials, such as lectures, readings, and assignments, on their own time within a given timeframe.

Online Synchronous Course: An online synchronous course is one in which students and instructors interact in real-time, live sessions at a scheduled time, often using online platforms like video conferencing, live chat, or streaming tools. This allows students and instructors to engage in learning activities simultaneously, creating a virtual classroom environment.

Web-Augmented Course: 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.”

Established Online/Hybrid Course: An established online/hybrid course is a course that is offered using online technology, that has previously been reviewed, approved and taught in an online, hybrid or web-augmented delivery mode.

Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program: 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. The definition of a Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program does not include programs in which 50 percent or less of the required credit hours are offered through distance education.

100-Percent Online Program: A degree program in which students complete 100 percent of the credit hours required for the program through 100-Percent Online Courses. Requirements for on-campus or in-person orientation, testing, academic support services, internships/fieldwork, or other non-instructional activities do not exclude a program from this category.

Hybrid Program: A degree program in which students complete more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of the credit hours required for the program through Distance Education Courses.

ITV Courses/Zoom Room Courses: ITV/Zoom Room courses are classified as distance education if the instructor is not present at the same location with the students at least 50% of the time. If an instructor is present at one location with some students more than 50% of the time, but less than 50% with students at another location, the course is considered distance education. If the instructor evenly divides time between two locations, meeting the 50% in-person requirement, the course is not classified as distance education.

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) or full-time/part-time status.

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

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

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

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 certifications provided by COLTT:

- Quality Matters
 - 8 Hours Face-to-Face
 - 2 Weeks Online
- LMS and Integrated Technologies Sessions
 - 2 Hours of LMS Training Sessions
 - 2 Hours of any Integrated Technology

Faculty Certification remains valid until a new edition of the Quality Matters Rubric is released. Upon recertification, faculty will be evaluated using the current edition of the rubric, and all online or hybrid courses they teach will be reviewed to ensure continued adherence to quality standards.

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

Note: Faculty who hold a current Quality Matters (QM) Rubric certification from another institution are exempt from the certification requirement described above, provided they submit evidence of certification based on the current QM Rubric. Faculty with other distance education certifications must submit documentation for review and evaluation by the Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology (COLTT).

Faculty members 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 deliver course-related material and 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 (COLTT), provides best practices, training, and other professional development opportunities to assist faculty members in developing or enhancing the skills required for teaching distance education courses. Professional development activities incorporate best practices and technology tools often used in distance education.

For courses offered in multiple modalities (face-to-face, distance education, online) the learning objectives of the course must be consistent across delivery formats.

5. Online and Hybrid Courses and Programs Expectations

All courses and programs must meet the established quality standards. Faculty members have the primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum for distance education courses. To ensure these standards are upheld, faculty must follow the [Quality Assurance Process](#) outlined by the Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology. This process provides structured guidelines and support to maintain consistency and academic excellence in online education.

[Distance Education Cours/Program Approval Process](#)