# Distance Education Course/Program Approval Process

## 1. Introduction

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley is committed to expanding educational opportunities through the development of new online programs and courses. Existing courses and programs may also be adapted for online or hybrid delivery.

Below are potential initiatives that require formal approval:

- Convert an existing face-to-face program to an online format (16-week or accelerated 7-week model)
- Convert an existing face-to-face course to an online or hybrid format
- Offer established online or hybrid courses
- Develop new online programs

## 2. Distance Education Course Development and Review Process

### A. Online Programs – Existing

(Conversion of an existing face-to-face program to a 16-week or accelerated 7-week online format)

1. **Institutional Approval**
   Existing programs must receive approval from the Undergraduate Committee or Graduate Committee before being offered online. This review process fulfills the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) requirement for peer review of alternative delivery methods.

2. **THECB Notification**
   The Office of Institutional Accreditation, Program Development, and Analysis will notify THECB to include the approved program in UTRGV's distance education program inventory.

3. **Ensuring Quality in Online Teaching**
   To maintain consistency and high-quality standards in online education, Academic Affairs and COLTT have established a continuous quality improvement process known as the Blueprinting Process. This process ensures that all online programs

are designed, developed, and implemented with academic rigor and alignment to institutional standards.

4. **Blueprinting Process for Online Programs**
   *(See attached Blueprinting Process Agreement. The agreement must be signed by the Dean, Department Chair, Program Coordinator, and COLTT Director.)*

**Blueprinting Steps:**

- The Instructional Designer Manager meets with the Dean, School Director/Department Chair, and Program Coordinator to initiate the process.
- The Blueprint Workshop Facilitator meets with participating faculty and the Department Chair and/or Program Coordinator to review expectations.
- The Department Chair, Program Coordinator, and Faculty review and sign the Blueprinting Process Agreement.
- Faculty certification is achieved by completing the *Applying the Quality Matters* workshop.
- Faculty begin the course design and development process.
- Program and course goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are aligned.
- Each course undergoes two internal Quality Assurance reviews:
    - First Review: Conducted by the faculty member.
    - Second Review: Conducted by the assigned Instructional Designer.
- Courses are offered for two academic terms to ensure effectiveness.
- Courses are then submitted to Quality Matters (QM) for external review and certification.

**B. Online and Hybrid Courses – Existing**
*(Conversion of an existing face-to-face course to an online or hybrid format)*

All online and hybrid courses offered at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley must be reviewed and approved by COLTT to ensure compliance with institutional quality assurance standards before being offered.

## Course Development and Approval

1. COLTT assigns an Instructional Designer to support faculty in designing and developing the online or hybrid course.
2. Courses must be fully developed and approved by COLTT a week before the first day of classes.

- Faculty teaching a new online or hybrid course must be assigned to the course at least four months before the semester begins to allow sufficient time for development and approval.

3. Major course development cannot occur during the semester in which the course is being offered.

## Roles and Responsibilities

1. Faculty (Subject Matter Experts) hold primary responsibility for the course's content, quality, and overall effectiveness.
2. The faculty member and Instructional Designer establish a timeline for course design, development, and review.
3. Faculty must grant the Instructional Designer access to the course for review and feedback.

### C. Established Online and Hybrid Courses

All established online and hybrid courses must undergo a COLTT review every three years as part of faculty recertification to ensure continued alignment with current quality assurance standards.

## Course Review and Update Process

1. COLTT assigns an Instructional Designer to assist faculty in reviewing and updating the course.
2. The faculty member, in collaboration with COLTT, reviews the course and implements updates based on Quality Matters Rubric recommendations.
3. The Instructional Designer provides constructive feedback to ensure ongoing course improvement and quality assurance.
4. Updated courses must be approved by COLTT a week before the term start date.
5. Faculty teaching an established online or hybrid course must be assigned at least four weeks before the semester begins to allow time for updates.
6. Any course modifications made during the semester must comply with Quality Matters and Accessibility Standards.

## Roles and Responsibilities

1. Faculty (Subject Matter Experts) hold primary responsibility for the course's content, quality, and overall effectiveness.
2. The faculty member and Instructional Designer establish a timeline for course design, development, and review.

3. Faculty must grant the Instructional Designer access to the course for review and feedback.

**D. Online Programs – New**

1. New programs initially approved for online delivery do not require additional institutional**,** UT System, or THECB approval.
2. If a new program was not originally proposed for online delivery, both Institutional and THECB approval must be obtained, following the procedures outlined in Section A above.
3. Program Coordinators contact COLTT to initiate the Blueprinting process with faculty designated to develop courses.

## Ensuring Quality in Online Teaching

To maintain consistency and academic excellence in online education, UTRGV has implemented a continuous quality improvement initiative known as the Blueprinting Process. This process ensures that all online programs are designed, developed, and delivered with high-quality standards and rigorous academic integrity.

**Blueprinting Process Steps:**

1. The Instructional Designer Manager meets with the Dean, School Director/Department Chair, and Program Coordinator to initiate the process.
2. The Blueprint Workshop Facilitator meets with participating faculty, along with the Department Chair and/or Program Coordinator, to review requirements.
3. The Department Chair, Program Coordinator, and Faculty review and sign the Blueprinting Process Agreement.
4. Faculty certification is obtained by completing the *Applying the Quality Matters* workshop.
5. **Faculty** begin the course design and development process.
6. Program and course goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are aligned.
7. Courses undergo two internal Quality Assurance reviews:
    - First Review: Conducted by the faculty member.
    - Second Review: Conducted by the assigned Instructional Designer.
8. Courses are offered for two terms to assess effectiveness and gather feedback.
9. Courses are then submitted to Quality Matters (QM) for formal external review.

## 3. Important Dates:

Courses that do not meet these requirements will be escalated. The Vice Provost for Academic & Student Success will contact the Dean, Department Chair, and Faculty of the affected course to notify them that the course cannot be offered online until it meets established readiness standards.

Faculty Course Assignments for Upcoming Semesters

### Established Courses

- Faculty with fully developed courses: Must be assigned at least 4 weeks before the semester begins.
- Faculty without existing course content: Must be assigned at least 4 months before the semester begins.

### Existing Courses Transitioning to a New Modality

- New modality (online, hybrid, or web-augmented): Faculty must be assigned at least 4 months before the semester begins.

**Note:** Faculty must ensure that all live courses have required content, materials, and technology accessible to students at least one week before the term start date.