

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE****DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY**

*Approved by the Department of Political Science, May 3, 2019.*

**A. Definition of Distance Education**

Distance education is 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 place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.<sup>1</sup>

**B. Curriculum**

1. The faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight of distance and correspondence education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.<sup>2</sup> Course instructors are expected to maintain high quality and insure that students taking distance education courses are exposed to the same content, and develop the same skills, as they would in a face to face course.

2. Individual faculty members or the department should have discretion in the choice of materials to be used in the distance education courses offered by the department.<sup>3</sup>

3. Faculty are primarily responsible for the content and rigor of the courses that they teach both online and in the classroom.<sup>4</sup>

4. Curriculum change refers to, but is not limited to, any additions, deletions, or revisions to courses, programs, degrees, majors and certificates including the requirements for admission, progression and completion.<sup>5</sup> The policy of UTRGV is that curriculum changes (additions, deletions and revisions) originate with the department or program faculty and are routed through the School/Department curriculum

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, "Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement," p. 1, available at <http://sacscoc.org/pdf/DistanceCorrespondenceEducation.pdf>, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, "Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement," p. 1, available at <http://sacscoc.org/pdf/DistanceCorrespondenceEducation.pdf>, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> University of Texas Board of Regents, "Rule 31004: Rights and Responsibilities of Faculty Members, paragraph 2, section 6, available at <https://www.utsystem.edu/board-of-regents/rules/31004-rights-and-responsibilities-faculty-members>

<sup>4</sup> See, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, *Handbook of Operating Procedures*, ADM 06-106.D.5(v), available at <https://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-06-106.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, *Handbook of Operating Procedures*, ADM 06-202.C. and D., available at <https://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-06-202.pdf>.

committee (if existent), the school director/department chair, College Curriculum Committees (if existent), college deans, University Curriculum Committee or Graduate Council as appropriate, to the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, President, The University of Texas System, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for approval when required.

### **C. Duties of Distance Education Faculty**

The primary duties of distance education instructors are identical to those of instructors who teach face to face courses.<sup>6</sup> Policies regarding specific teaching-related activities include the following:

1. Syllabus: The faculty member shall issue a syllabus to students and post it online via UTRGV's Faculty Portfolio Tool (FPT) within the first seven days of the first class of the semester. The syllabus shall at minimum contain:

- a. The faculty member's office number and office hours, email, and other contact information;
- b. A complete list of required and recommended texts, readings, and other course materials;
- c. A brief description of each major component of the course, including examinations and major assignments;
- d. The tentative course subject outline in chronological order;
- e. Grading system in course;
- f. The faculty member's policy in regard to absences and make-up work;
- g. Student Learning Objectives (SLOs);
- h. Any other information that satisfies the syllabus standards adopted by UTRGV or the faculty member's college or department/school.

2. Final Examinations:

- a. Faculty members and students are expected to adhere to the published examination schedules.
- b.. Permission to change the scheduled time of an examination must be secured from the appropriate Dean.
- c. Final examinations material will be filed for at least one semester. Students will be permitted to examine their own work.

3. Office Hours or Times Accessible to Students:

- a. Faculty are expected to be accessible to their students outside the classroom (physical or virtual) via email, telephone and office hours.

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<sup>6</sup> See, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, *Handbook of Operating Procedures*, ADM 06-106.D.5(a), available at <https://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-06-106.pdf>.

b. The teaching schedule and office hours shall be listed in the syllabus and posted in the Learning Management System and be available in the department office. Faculty members are to be available to students during the posted office hours.

4. Textbook and Course Material: Faculty members shall submit their textbook adoptions during the preceding semester, by the beginning of the registration period. Individual faculty members or the department should have discretion in the choice of materials to be used in the courses offered by the department.

#### **D. Training and Certification.**

1. Faculty who teach online in the Department of Political Science must receive appropriate training in the Learning Management System (e.g., Basic Blackboard Training).<sup>7</sup>

2. Faculty in the Department of Political Science who teach large (75 or more students) online courses must receive appropriate training in Teaching Large Online Sections.

3. Faculty in the Department of Political Science who teach Interactive Television (ITV) courses must receive appropriate training in Teaching Interactive Television courses.

4. It is recommended, but not required that faculty in the Department of Political Science who teach distance education courses complete Quality Matters training.

5. Once a faculty member is appropriately trained, the faculty member's certification to teach distance education courses is permanent and shall not be subject to periodic renewal. However, the Department of Political Science *Evaluation Criteria and Standards for Annual Review, Tenure and Promotion, and Post-Tenure Review* incentivize all faculty to remain technologically and pedagogically up-to-date in their teaching by voluntarily completing teaching workshops from time to time.

6. The Department of Political Science shall recognize distance education training received at other accredited institutions of higher education, and prior experience teaching distance education courses, as meeting the training requirement in this section.

7. The Department Chair shall be the final decision-maker in deciding whether a faculty member is qualified to teach a distance education course and assigned to teach a distance education course.<sup>8</sup>

8. The Department of Political Science will not seek, does not require, and does not recommend that faculty seek the certification or approval of courses by any external organization without specialized expertise in the discipline of political science.

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<sup>7</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, "Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement," p. 1, available at <http://sacscoc.org/pdf/DistanceCorrespondenceEducation.pdf>, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, *Handbook of Operating Procedures*, ADM 06-303.D.5 states that "the Department Chair is responsible for the overall leadership, management, and administration of the school or department, including: a. Pursuing and achieving departmental excellence in teaching, research, and service;...d. Management and professional development of faculty members and staff;...f. Recruitment, retention, evaluation and promotion of faculty; g. Development of curriculum;"; available at <https://www.utrgv.edu/hop/policies/adm-06-303.pdf>.

## Evaluation & Assessment

1. Comparability of distance education courses to campus-based courses is ensured by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes in POLS 2305 US Federal Government & Politics and POLS 2306 Texas Government & Politics.

2. Comparability of distance education courses to campus-based courses is ensured by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including student satisfaction as measured by a course evaluation instrument that measures competencies and course design specific to distance education. The course evaluation instrument will be made available to students prior to the end of the course at the same time and in the same manner as course evaluation instruments for all other courses.<sup>9</sup>

3. Comparability of distance education courses to campus-based courses is ensured by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including Peer Observation.<sup>10</sup>

a. Tenure-track and Non-tenure track Faculty who taught at least half of their courses online in the previous academic year are required to complete their mandatory peer observation (once per year) by having one of their online sections peer reviewed as required by the Department of Political Science and University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Peer Observation policies. The Peer Observation must be conducted by another faculty member who is trained to teach online.

b. Tenured Faculty who teach at least half of their courses online in the previous three academic years are required to complete their mandatory peer observation (once every 3 years) by having one of their online sections peer reviewed as required by the Department of Political Science and University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Peer Observation policies. The Peer Observation must be conducted by another faculty member who is trained to teach online.

4. All distance education courses offered by faculty in the Department of Political Science will, at a minimum, meet the organizational standards established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges "Online Course Review Check List."

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<sup>9</sup> Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, "Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement," p. 1, available at <http://sacscoc.org/pdf/DistanceCorrespondenceEducation.pdf>, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Division of Faculty Affairs, "Guidelines for Faculty Peer Observation of Teaching," Available at [https://www.utrgv.edu/academicaffairs/\\_files/documents/faculty-resources/utrgv-guidelines-for-faculty-peer-observation%20of%20teaching.pdf](https://www.utrgv.edu/academicaffairs/_files/documents/faculty-resources/utrgv-guidelines-for-faculty-peer-observation%20of%20teaching.pdf)