



Name of Policy	Online Course Development and Teaching Policy
Description of Policy	Best practices policies and procedures for distance education at Alcorn State University.
Policy applies to	<input type="checkbox"/> University-wide <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specific (<i>all distance education courses online and hybrid.</i>)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff only <input type="checkbox"/> Students only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty and Students
Policy status	<input type="checkbox"/> New policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revision of existing policy

Approval authority	President
Governing authority	Office of Academic Affairs
Responsible officer	Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Approval date	March 17, 2025
Effective date	March 17, 2025
Approval date of last revision	N/A
Effective date of last revision	N/A
Date of policy review*	N/A

**unless otherwise indicated, this policy will still apply beyond the review date*

Related legislation, policies, procedures, guidelines, and local protocols	State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA)
---	---

Table of Contents

1. Overview	2
2. Purpose	2
3. Scope/Application	2
4. Policy Statement and Principles	2
5. Roles and Responsibilities	15
6. Review.....	16
7. Revision made to this Policy	17
8. Glossary of Terms/Definitions	17

1. Overview

Alcorn State University is committed to providing students from diverse backgrounds with high-quality distance education opportunities consistent with its role and mission. These policies and procedures adhere to the best-established practices in distance education. These practices have been proved through continuous evaluation at Alcorn and the higher education community. Its values are quality, integrity, and student-centeredness. Following these best practices, Alcorn will employ appropriate learning technologies and delivery formats to offer a variety of courses and programs to its students. The following elements of best practices inform student preparation and orientation, faculty orientation and development, deployment of the Alcorn curricula at a distance, and evaluation of students and faculty in their respective review processes.

As the rapidly changing world of distance education evolves, so will Alcorn State University's best practices. These guidelines are a living document intended to be continuously reviewed, updated, and revised to maintain the highest standard of best practices in distance education.

2. Purpose

This policy sets clear guidelines and procedures for developing, delivering, and evaluating distance education courses at Alcorn State University. This policy ensures that distance education programs meet the same high standards of quality, accessibility, and academic integrity as traditional on-campus programs while providing flexibility and support for students and faculty.

3. Scope/Application

This policy applies to all distance education (online and hybrid) courses and programs at Alcorn State University.

4. Policy Statement and Principles

Distance Education Goals/Guiding Principles

1. All distance education courses are taught by faculty with the same standards, prerequisites, and requirements as on-campus sections of similar courses.
2. All Alcorn policies and procedures, standards, and guidelines for on-campus programs and instruction apply to distance education instruction unless otherwise noted in the University policy manual or student handbook.
3. Distance education courses are comparable to on-campus courses in terms of course descriptions, academic expectations, and student learning outcomes.
4. Faculty members teaching online courses have the same teaching course load limitations and restrictions as faculty teaching face-to-face on-campus courses.
5. Faculty members teaching online courses have the same student enrollment course load limitations and restrictions as faculty teaching face-to-face on-campus courses.
6. In general, faculty teaching loads are fully face-to-face or a mixture of face-to-face and online. On some occasions, faculty teaching loads may be entirely comprised of distance education courses; in all cases, however, faculty teaching distance education courses are not excused from keeping reasonable face-to-face office hours and participating in required campus-based events and service to the university.

7. Alcorn State University retains ownership of all course materials developed using university funds and resources. These resources include but are not limited to:
 - Funding provided by the university for course development.
 - Use of university facilities, equipment, and technology.
 - Support from university staff or departments such as instructional design, IT services, and media production.
8. Student enrollment for fully online courses is capped at 30 students per section.

Faculty

1. All academic units must recruit, support, and enable faculty members to design, develop, and teach distance education courses effectively.
2. All academic units must maintain the human and technical resources and network infrastructure to support and deliver distance education reliably.
3. All academic units must assess emerging methods and technological avenues for providing and delivering efficient and effective distance education.

Students

1. All academic units are expected to attract, retain, and graduate an engaged and success-oriented distance learner population.
2. All academic units must provide tools to assess student readiness for the online learning environment.
3. All academic units provide appropriate library resources, reference services, and information literacy instruction to meet the needs of the distance learner.

Curriculum & Instruction

1. All academic units must provide access to high-quality programs to meet a diverse populace's educational and training needs within and beyond Alcorn State University's typical geographic service region.
2. All academic units must evaluate student learning outcomes and continuously assess distance education programs and courses.

Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation

1. New (full-time, part-time, or adjunct) faculty members must complete the Online Faculty Certification course.
2. The Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation will mentor all first-time online instructors for the duration of their first distance education course.
3. The Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation offers ongoing professional development opportunities in distance education strategies and technology tools to ensure best practices are integrated into distance education courses.

4. After approval, faculty must work with the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation when developing new or revising existing courses.

Approval and Review Process for Online Courses

1. All online and hybrid courses must follow the same approval procedures as traditional face-to-face courses, including review and approval by the Program and University Curriculum Committee.
2. Distance education courses and programs must undergo an internal review process for approval.

Faculty Qualifications, Rights, and Evaluation

1. Faculty who teach in distance education programs and online courses must meet the same qualifications as faculty who teach in traditional courses at Alcorn State University.
2. Faculty who teach online courses must be certified by the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation and take the online faculty certification course.
3. Faculty who teach in distance education programs and online courses have the same Faculty Rights and Responsibilities as faculty who teach in traditional, on-campus courses and have the same limitations and restrictions on teaching course loads and student enrollment in each course.
4. Faculty teaching in distance education programs and online courses are evaluated using the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation evaluation procedures and instruments.

Distance Education Training

Distance education training aims to equip educators, administrators, and staff with the knowledge, skills, and tools to deliver high-quality, engaging, and effective online learning experiences. This training ensures that all stakeholders involved in distance education are prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners while maintaining institutional standards and compliance.

- Faculty who teach distance education courses must be certified by the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation and take the Online Faculty certification course. Changes may occasionally arise. Therefore, previously certified faculty may require an update in certification.
- Faculty must complete training before developing a new online course. To design and develop online courses, faculty will utilize the OSCQR SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric (see Appendix D). The OSCQR SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric and Process aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of online courses continuously. It provides a systematic and consistent approach to collecting data, which can be used to inform faculty development and support large-scale online course design review and refresh efforts.
- In addition, the College or School department guidelines are followed to ensure that course content is organized in a logical system that meets other required standards, such as accreditation, and is easily accessible to the student.

Faculty Responsibilities

1. Faculty will follow university, college/school, and departmental guidelines for developing, scheduling, and presenting distance education courses.

2. Faculty will ensure that the rigor of programs and quality of instruction are maintained within online courses (e.g., course design, course content, delivery of instruction, evaluating student progress, assessing learning outcomes, and timely communication with students) and that they meet the same standards and criteria set for traditional campus-based courses.
3. Faculty will develop and maintain currency with the latest technologies and pedagogical techniques by participating in group professional development activities, one-on-one support sessions, or self-study.
4. Faculty will participate in curriculum development, coordinate syllabi, and prepare comprehensive examinations, as required.
5. Faculty will assist in ordering any textbooks and/or supplementary materials necessary for the course via the eFollett Textbook Adoption website.
6. Faculty will provide for and maintain regular, appropriate interaction with distance education students.
7. Faculty will grade student assignments, projects, and tests following a schedule that has been communicated to students. Standards range from 5-7 days after a deadline for grading and returning student work with feedback.
8. Faculty will assist in developing processes to ensure the integrity of student work within the plagiarism-checking software included in the Alcorn Canvas LMS configuration. Faculty are responsible for learning how to interpret plagiarism software reports.
9. Faculty will evaluate online courses each semester they are offered to ensure that the materials and content remain current and relevant.
10. Faculty will identify computer literacy prerequisites needed for students to participate successfully so students may be properly advised about the skill level that is required for the successful completion of the course.
11. Faculty will ensure that external links to third-party materials, resources, and educational applications embedded in the online classroom can enhance course instruction. All third-party assignment and assessment grades must be entered into the Canvas course shell. External learning management systems that are used in place of the University-approved Center for Information Technology Services (CITS) system violate this policy.
12. Faculty will support and adhere to Alcorn State University Information Technologies Acceptable Use Statement and other related university policies.
13. Faculty will observe copyright laws and guidelines regarding the Internet, the World Wide Web, software, and the use and reproduction of materials.
14. Faculty will secure copyright clearances on any copyright-protected materials used in online course development.

Department Chair Responsibilities to Faculty Teaching Online Courses

1. The Department Chair ensures departmental governance is adhered to for new and revised online courses.
2. The Department Chair ensures all faculty teaching online courses know the policies and procedures for planning and conducting distance education.

3. The Department Chair ensures that faculty teaching online courses receive appropriate training from the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation.
4. Department Chairs are granted observational access to faculty teaching online within their departments. As with face-to-face classes, department chairs and senior colleagues exercise respect for each faculty's online classroom. Department Chairs will not change, add to, or delete any content or setting within an online classroom under their observation. Instead, they will email or consult with faculty outside the online classroom environment regarding any concerns.

Student Responsibilities

1. Students are expected to ascertain possession of the appropriate skills, competency levels, course prerequisites, and equipment (including browser, operating system, and software) required for the distance education course.
2. Students must determine that the course meets individual degree requirements.
3. Students must assume responsibility for contacting their assigned advisor/instructor as needed.
4. Students are expected to complete all assigned coursework by deadlines and before the end of the term.
5. Students are expected to participate in evaluating the course content and presentation and the distance education program.
6. Students must follow all relevant university guidelines, including the code of conduct and academic honesty policy.
7. Students must read and adhere to Alcorn State University's Information Technologies Acceptable Use Statement and other related university policies for all courses requiring computer usage.
8. Students must observe copyright laws and guidelines pertaining to the Internet, the World Wide Web, software, and the use and reproduction of materials.
9. Students are expected to observe mutual respect in all classroom interactions, recognizing that opinions and positions do not always have to be agreed upon, but respect should always be shown.
10. Students may obtain academic advising and other support services via phone, e-mail, or in person. Program materials clearly describe how students obtain these support services.

Student Support

Students enrolled in distance education programs and courses shall have access to various student services to support their learning comparable to those enrolled in a traditional course. Students taking distance education courses will be held to the exact requirements of academic integrity as students enrolled in traditional courses.

1. The Center for Information Technology Services (CITS) provides orientation opportunities and resources for students enrolled in online courses appropriate to the technologies used, the content, and the learner.

2. Department Chairs, Deans, and instructors will be responsible for ensuring that all distance education program materials clearly and accurately represent the program, including detailed program completion requirements, the nature of the learning experience, programs, faculty responsibilities, and the nature of faculty-student, student-faculty, and student-student interaction opportunities, techniques, and requirements. In the case of hybrid courses, information regarding the percentage of the course to be done at a distance and the nature of that experience will be provided to students during course registration and will accurately represent the expectations.
3. Instructors and Department Chairs will be responsible for ensuring that all distance education course materials clearly and accurately represent the course, including the nature of the learning experience, faculty responsibilities, and the nature of faculty-student, student-faculty, and student-student interaction opportunities, techniques, and requirements. Alcorn State University students enrolled in distance education will have access to academic support, advisement, course registration, and financial aid assistance appropriate for distance education students (i.e., distance education students will not be required to come to campus to obtain these services). Technology assistance is available through the University's 24-hour helpdesk.
4. Alcorn provides library and information resources, services, and support for academic programs, including training in information literacy. These resources and services are accessible at a distance on a timely basis. Through Alcorn State University's library web pages, access is maintained to scholarly databases and the online catalog of materials owned by the libraries. Interlibrary loan service is accessible to distance education students via the web page to borrow materials from our libraries. Resource material is available electronically through this system and via postal delivery for items that cannot be transmitted electronically. Personal assistance is available from the librarians and staff via email and telephone.
5. Administrative processes such as admissions and registration are accessible to distance students via the [Alcorn State University](#) website. Students will be provided with e-mail accounts and access to the university's portal. Students can register online and access course schedules, grades, degree audits, financial aid, and billing information. Tuition payments can be made online. Additionally, the bookstore is available via the web, and all books and course materials can be purchased online. Program materials will clearly describe how access is obtained.

Outcomes Assessment

1. Distance education programs are expected to produce the same learning outcomes as classroom-based programs. The procedure for assessing and evaluating these outcomes will be similar to those used for other Alcorn State University programs.
2. All programs at Alcorn State University are designed to be coherent; the components each serve a purpose and build on one another (whether sequentially or in parallel) to achieve predetermined, measurable learning outcomes. Sometimes, specific courses are identified as the means of achieving specific program goals and objectives (such as writing in the discipline). It is up to each department to establish a plan for how each course fits into programs, how courses build on one another, and in which courses each program's goal is addressed.
3. The means chosen for assessing student learning are appropriate to the program content, course learning design, available technologies, and characteristics of the learners. The instruments used for assessing student learning online may differ from those used for assessing learning in the traditional classroom.
4. Online course activities generate more written records of student thinking (in discussion boards, for example), which distance education instructors may archive and analyze later in detail (looking for timely appearance in discussions of keywords and phrases, for example). In keeping this extensive course "paper trail," security is paramount and student privacy is always protected.

Program Evaluation

1. The institution has processes to regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of its programs, including distance education programs, both at the course and program level. An example would be the Student Course Evaluation.
2. The Alcorn State University Student Course Evaluation will be available for every online and hybrid course through the Center for Information Technology Services (CITS) two weeks before the conclusion of full-semester courses and one week before intensive courses. Students and faculty will be notified via email when the surveys have been deployed. Survey results will be anonymous.
3. The chairs will promptly review Student Course Evaluations, which will be shared with the Department Deans and the Provost.
4. The evaluation results are used for continuous program improvement. Chairs and instructors monitor student progress and complaints and develop intervention strategies utilizing academic support staff (e.g., Academic Advising, tutors, the Writing Center) where needed.
5. Program evaluation procedures include a determination that distance education programs result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the college degree or certificate awarded. All graduate and undergraduate programs (traditional and online) demonstrate that students achieve deep learning. Program Evaluation Surveys will be administered apart from Student Course Evaluations.

Essential Elements for a Canvas Online Classroom (Many or most of these elements should be separated within the Canvas platform.)

1. Syllabus—The same information in your face-to-face class syllabus should be conveyed here. All distance learning courses should follow the online course syllabus template. It is best to keep the syllabus concise and provide supplemental information elsewhere.
2. Course Description—This section provides a short, engaging description of the course and its primary objectives. It can often be drawn from the syllabus.
3. Course Information—This section provides information such as grading rubric(s), links to eBooks for the course if available, and supplemental resources such as information about and links to the library, writing center, or similar resources.
4. Submission Links—These links provide the location for students to submit all graded assignments and are generally directly linked to the online grade book for ease in grading and record keeping.
5. Class Café—Create a discussion forum that provides a "safe place" for students to interact with faculty members and each other in a non-graded, non-judgmental manner. For instance, a faculty member might provide a warm, non-academic greeting before the course begins and invite students to do the same during Week One. The faculty member will respond to all student introductions during the first week and then, generally, leave the Class Café as a student-to-student forum for the rest of the term.
6. Instructor Contact Information—While each instructor will determine how he or she prefers to be contacted by students and conform to the university's policy (telephone, email, etc.), this information should be listed on the course homepage.
7. Welcome/Bio—This section includes a short academic biography of the instructor. It should be included in the Getting Started section of the course.

8. **Frequently Asked Questions**—Strongly encourage students to ask all nonpersonal questions about the course within this forum. The faculty member will answer questions here so all students can benefit from the answers. Personal student concerns, such as grades, should not be discussed publicly. Students will use the Canvas Inbox to contact the instructor to comply with FERPA policies. Contact the Instructor posts should be responded to within 24 hours when possible.
9. **Announcements**—This section provides the instructor a space before and during the course to post important information specific to this course (specific grading expectations, expectations regarding class participation, general feedback on assignments appropriate for the entire class, etc.). Communicating the same information to students in multiple ways is vital, so it does not matter if announcements include repeated information from the syllabus.
10. **Weekly Module Sections**—A separate learning module section for each week of the course should highlight a module overview, learning objectives, assignments, and assessments due each week and provide instructions for those assignments. Instructors should post video, audio, and/or written lectures or notes and any specific guidance documents for the course. Additionally, each weekly module should include a link to the Discussion area for that week.
11. **Academic Integrity**—This section should be developed according to Alcorn's specific policies regarding academic integrity. Students should know these policies in advance, so posting an announcement directing students to this link during Week One is good practice.

Optional Elements for a Canvas Online Classroom

1. **Calendar**—This link may repeat information from the syllabus but is usually presented in a graphical format, highlighting the due dates for each assignment.
2. **Course Materials**—This section allows the instructor to provide links to supplemental reading materials.
3. **Live Chat**—The primary purpose of asynchronous online learning is to provide students with other commitments a chance to learn at their own pace and in their own time without requiring them to be present at specific time intervals; however, optional live chat sessions with the faculty member (usually no more than once per week) can take the place of keeping "office hours." They can enrich the discussion experience for students. It is generally best to vary the times for the chats or to hold all of them in the evening hours. Better still, consider polling your students about the most convenient times.
4. **Groups**—Canvas allows you to keep all students enrolled in the course in one group or divide students into smaller groups. For courses with an enrollment of 10 or fewer students, unless students are doing group projects, it is generally best not to break students into groups. For large enrollment courses (20 plus), it is often best to divide students into smaller groups, especially for discussion purposes, so that the number of posts each student must review does not become overwhelming. The instructor does the same amount of work either way, and this is a personal choice of the instructor based on the course being taught.
5. **Video and Audio**—Canvas supports audio and video technology like Jing or YouTube. If audio and video enhance the course rather than add unnecessary complexity, they can be practical instructional tools. For instance, a nursing student needs to hear a heart murmur to understand what it sounds like rather than simply reading about it in a book.

General Guidelines for Assignments

The basic rule is that an online course should include the same amount of academic rigor and essential activities as a face-to-face course of the same duration. It is generally best to keep reading and writing expectations to the

maximum they must be but the minimum they can be to cover the learning objectives sufficiently. Considering the course level— beginning undergraduate, advanced undergraduate, or graduate- is also essential when designing any course. The number and type of assignments vary considerably based on the content being taught, so these guidelines should be broadly considered and sometimes even overruled by content-based considerations of each discipline. It is a best practice in online education to keep online course shells as similar as possible throughout the student's learning experience, and it is also a best practice for multiple sections of the same course to be built with the same course content, including assignments. Determining point values for each assignment is best done through individual consultation with each department or faculty member and should be specific to each course.

1. Discussion—Students should be required to participate early and often in weekly discussions with the instructor and classmates. Consider starting each week with a "discussion spark," which is an open-ended question relating the primary learning outcomes of the week to some aspects of students' professional lives. Students should be able to respond to the spark from their own experience without doing any reading or research. In some undergraduate courses where most students are not working adults, the spark should relate to their personal lives or current events. The purpose is to engage students from day one of each week.
2. Additionally, students should be required to post one more detailed "main" post by mid-week each week (based on reading and/or research) and to respond to the main post of at least one classmate by the end of each week (total of three weekly posts minimum with more posts expected). For the most part, discussions should not be accepted as late work because when each week is over, there is no way to engage with classmates in discussion. When facilitated diligently and creatively by the faculty member, online discussion threads can be just as engaging and valuable to students as face-to-face learning and are often where the best learning occurs online. See the [Non-Quality and Quality Examples of Feedback to Peers in the Discussions](#) document for examples of non-quality vs quality student discussion responses.
3. Group Projects—The same pros and cons surrounding group projects exist online as in face-to-face classrooms—the imbalance of student participation, difficulty scheduling group work time (cons), and simulation of real workplace teams (pro). Generally, group projects should be considered when they serve the content taught. One way to effectively include group work but keep it manageable for students is to engage them in peer editing each other's assignments. For example, each student should be required to post a draft in Doc Sharing and edit one classmate's draft.
4. Final Projects and Weekly Milestones—Final or Capstone projects are often the most extensive and time-consuming of many courses. Help students overcome the tendency to procrastinate and help them begin to see learning as a process rather than a destination by dividing the final projects into weekly milestones. Require one small element of the final project to be due each week and tie a few points to each milestone assignment. Each week's milestone is built on the ones already completed, and by the time the final project is due, students have a big head start on it. It is generally best to require final projects due in the next-to-last rather than the last week of the course in case students are late getting them done and to allow more time for grading.
5. Quizzes and Exams—Like group work, there are many schools of thought about the validity and necessity of quizzes and exams. Generally, if you are a faculty member who relies heavily on these tools in other classroom settings, you will probably depend on them in online settings. If you believe student learning is best measured in different ways, such as evaluating student writing, you will probably rely less on quizzes and exams. They can be embedded directly into the classroom shells, and like other elements, they can be "hidden" from students' view until their time in the course arrives. Remember, regardless of the honor code or other safeguards, it is challenging to monitor academic integrity in online courses regarding quizzes and objective exams. It is easier to monitor the academic integrity of written assignments through programs such as Turnitin.

6. Research Papers, Weekly Writing Assignments, or Practice Assignments—Research papers, journals, weekly short essays, book reviews, literature reviews, mathematical problems, etc., can all be incorporated into your asynchronous online courses just as they can be incorporated into your face-to-face and synchronous online courses. The content being taught, as well as the level of the course, should largely dictate the number, length, and type of written assignments. Refrain from the assumption that significantly more or less work should be assigned in online courses.

Attachment A: Alcorn State University Online Teaching Policy

Overview

The Online Faculty Certification Course is developed and delivered in-house through the University Learning Management System (as of this policy's writing, Canvas Instructure). This training explores the nuts and bolts of the University Learning Management System, including how to set up your course, communication tools, assessments, grade book, etc. This course allows instructors to experience the course from the perspective of the student/end-user. Concurrently, it will enable the instructor to glean best practices in online teaching methods. It guides the instructor through exercises in different ways, such as when the student interacts with the teacher.

Teaching Online Education Certification Policy

All instructors who teach online (OL) and hybrid (HY) courses must have proof of Online Faculty Certification to teach online course sections within the University Learning Management System.

In the usual case, instructors need not re-certify for online teaching unless there are significant changes to the in-house certification course's curriculum, typically caused by significant changes in the University's LMS and/or substantial changes in University Online Education policies. However, under certain circumstances, an instructor may be required to re-certify through a re-take of the Online Faculty Certification course (i.e., a gap in instruction, lack of use of LMS technology, etc.). The Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation director can recommend this to the faculty through the department chair.

In conjunction with CITS team members, the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation director designs, tests, validates, and deploys the course through the University's learning management system. Each training module includes web-based certification modules with stated outcome-based achievement metrics. The instructor must pass the test for all the modules to be certified. Each module will be updated with updates to the learning management system and/or University policies that affect the teaching/offering of online course sections.

Process

Once the instructor has earned his/her certification or been approved by the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation, the certification documentation will be recorded and placed in the faculty or staff member's file in the Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation. Data reports relevant to certification rates are provided to third-party reviewers, auditors, and accreditation reviewers on a legitimate need basis to fulfill the university's reporting requirements.

ATTACHMENT B: FULL-TIME ONLINE TEACHING POLICY

- Satisfactory completion and passing of Online Faculty Certification Course (online faculty must obtain passing a grade before beginning teaching).
- Teaching assignments include at least four classes per semester for the Fall and Spring semesters.
- Primary assignments are teaching, conducting student advising, and performing other duties assigned by the department chair or dean following contractual requirements and time commitments.
- Required credentials to teach the courses assigned.
- Eligible to participate in the full-time employee benefit programs; and
- An annual contract expires at the end of the calendar year or follows the specific terms of the contract.

- Faculty may be required to meet with the Department Chair/Dean/Provost at the main campus twice during the academic year (once in the Fall and once in the Spring) to participate in training, course discussions, and other activities within the teaching disciplines.

Minimum Online Qualifications to teach full time

- Undergraduate courses – Master's degree and 18 graduate credits in your teaching area
- Graduate courses – Terminal degree and 18 post-graduate credits in your area of teaching

Potential faculty should have two to five years of work experience.

Required Time Commitment

- Log into the online class at least five (5) days out of seven (7) to participate in discussions, timely grading, Q&A, and general course management.
- Respond to student questions within 24 hours and 48 hours on weekends.
- Complete midterm and final grading activities within a 48-hour window.
- It is strongly suggested that online courses have a maximum of 30 students to ensure practical learning experiences for the learners.
- Hold virtual office hours (via BigBlueButton, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom)
 - (Office hours = one hour per hour of instruction each week, e.g., 3 hours for a 3-credit hour course)

Semester Length

- 4 weeks
- 8 weeks
- 16 weeks

Computer/Technical Requirements

- Access to reliable high-speed Internet and a computer with current software in the Microsoft environment.

ATTACHMENT C: PROTOCOL FOR ONLINE COURSES

Instructors of online courses must maintain strong and active communication to support student success and foster ongoing engagement between students and professors.

To ensure that best online practices are deployed to achieve maximum student retention and learning outcome attainment, the following guidelines should be followed:

- The professor should provide a weekly welcome note or announcement at the beginning of each week of class.
- The syllabus/class schedule is posted.
- The instructor's contact information and office hours are posted.
- Timely return of assignments and feedback. This means all work should be graded and available for student viewing within seven days after the prior week.
- Along with announcements and welcome messages, regular course website updates and postings should be shared with students.
- Mass and individual email communications should be made with all students. The use of personal (non-university issued) email accounts is prohibited.
- The professor should answer all email correspondence within 24 hours of receiving students' questions and concerns.

- Contact students who have not logged in for over four days to inquire whether they're experiencing technical difficulties or problems with course content/activities (report such findings).

Monitoring from Center for Faculty/Staff Director/Department Chairs

1. The Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation consistently monitors the online faculty's presence. A pre-course checklist evaluation (see Appendix B) will be performed before the beginning of each semester for all online courses. A final review will be conducted at the end of each semester, and a copy will be provided to all chairs and faculty, which shows their effectiveness in adhering to the policies throughout the online course (See Appendix C). Continued approval to teach online is contingent upon adherence to the tenets of this protocol.
2. The Center will utilize the OSCQR SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric (see Appendix D) to review online courses for quality. The OSCQR SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric and Process aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of online courses continuously. All online courses must receive approval from the department chair, instructional designer, college/school dean, and provost prior to being offered online. Each online course will be reviewed once every three years (at minimum).

STATE AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

What is State Authorization?

States require institutions to obtain approval for regulated activities that occur in their state. These requirements vary by state, including online learning, practical experiences, faculty in the state, marketing, advertising, and more. Compliance with state authorization regulations is also required by the federal government for institutions to be eligible for federal financial aid.

What is SARA, and why is it important in distance education?

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, commonly known as SARA, is a set of agreements between member states, districts, and territories that establish comparable national standards for interstate distance education program offerings. These reciprocity agreements help streamline distance education regulations, improve coordination between states and higher education institutions, and help ensure member states and participating institutions adhere to a set of common consumer protections for students. Participation in SARA is voluntary. States join as members voluntarily, just as institutions voluntarily participate through their home states.

SARA's policies help protect students and provide benefits to both states and institutions carrying out distance education in multiple states. As of 2022, 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are members of SARA. Over 2,300 colleges and universities participate in SARA.

Mississippi became a National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements member - NC-SARA on January 1, 2016. Alcorn State University is an institutional participant in SARA. ASU is authorized to offer distance education courses in all states listed as NC-SARA states (see the [Mississippi NC-SARA](#) page).

ASU STUDENT COMPLAINT PROCESS

Alcorn State University seeks to resolve concerns and complaints fairly and promptly. Students must follow the University's Student Grievance Policy to file a complaint. Students should exhaust internal complaint processes before pursuing external complaint processes.

If a complaint cannot be resolved through the Alcorn State University Academic Complaint Process, students may file a complaint with the Mississippi Commission on College Accreditation following the [MCCA Student Complaint Process](#) within two years of the incident. If the complaint is outside of MCCA's jurisdiction, it may

be directed to another authorized agency to address the concerns, if appropriate. Note: This process is not applicable for matters related to student grades or discipline/conduct matters.

Students may also send concerns to Alcorn State University's regional accrediting agency, SACSCOC, in the unlikely event a complaint is not resolved after all university avenues have been exhausted.

COMPLAINT FOR OUT-OF-STATE DISTANCE STUDENTS

Students outside Mississippi who desire to resolve a grievance regarding any ASU online course(s) will follow the University's Student Grievance Policy as outlined in the [Alcorn State University Student Handbook](#). After having exhausted the institutional and [MCCA](#) student complaint processes resolution process, an out-of-state student taking distance education courses at ASU may file a complaint with the SARA portal agent with all matters other than conduct and grade-related complaints. Note: The MCCA Student Complaint Process does not apply to complaints related to student grades or discipline/conduct matters.

ATTENDANCE

Student attendance requirements in an online class will be explained in the syllabus. Attendance must be recorded within the first week of an online class by showing students' participation in a class activity. Students must actively participate by submitting assignments or engaging with instructors or peers. Simply logging into a class does not constitute attendance. Weekly assignment submissions are strongly encouraged. Activity options to comply with weekly attendance requirements include:

- Assignments
- Discussions
- Exams
- Quizzes

COPYRIGHT COMPLIANCE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES

Copyright compliance is a critical aspect of distance education. The digital nature of online courses can pose unique challenges in ensuring that copyrighted materials are used lawfully.

Faculty members are expected to understand and adhere to the copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code), as updated by the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act ("TEACH Act"). Copyright law must be followed when performances, displays, copies, or other reproductions of copyrighted material are made available to students. This includes posting copyrighted material to the University's learning management system (i.e., Canvas) or other online sites. Under the TEACH Act, it is permissible to make copyrighted materials available to students, providing that such materials: (1) do not exceed an amount or duration comparable to that typically displayed in a live classroom setting; (2) are directly related to the course content; (3) are an integral part of the teaching content; (4) are intended solely for and are available only to students enrolled in the course; and (5) are retained only for the class session. The students must be notified that the materials may be subject to copyright protection.

FAIR USE

Fair Use is an important copyright concept for educators who use copyrighted works in their teaching. The Fair Use doctrine permits limited *use* of copyrighted material without acquiring permission from the rights holders. If a use falls outside the fair use guidelines, permission often must be requested and received from the copyright holder to be lawful.

Section 107 of Title 17, U. S. Code contains a list of the various purposes for which the reproduction of a particular work may be considered fair, such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. Section 107 also sets out four factors to be considered in determining whether a particular use is fair:

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. The nature of copyrighted work
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
4. The effect of the use upon the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work

The distinction between fair use and infringement may be unclear and not easily defined. No specific number of words, lines, or notes may safely be taken without permission.

PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE

Turnitin is an academic integrity tool built into Canvas. This tool compares submitted assignments against a set of academic papers to identify areas of overlap between the submitted assignment and existing works. It is effective as both a deterrent and an educational tool. Use Turnitin to review assignment submissions for originality and create opportunities to help students identify how to properly cite sources rather than paraphrase.

Turnitin is based on a unique text-matching algorithm that detects exact and inexact matching between a paper and source material. Submissions are compared against several databases:

- Global Student Papers Database: Contains papers that were submitted by students from around the world to help prevent cross-institution plagiarism.
- Internet Archive: Comprehensive index of pages available for public access on the Internet.
- Premium scholarly publications: 190M subscription articles, 81 thousand subscription journals, 1.5 thousand publishers, 12 thousand open access repositories, and 97% of the top 10 thousand journals are included in the database.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: [Online Syllabus Template](#)
- Appendix B: [Pre-Course Checklist](#)
- Appendix C: [Faculty Evaluation Rubric](#)
- Appendix D: [OSCQR Course Design Review Scorecard](#)
- Appendix E: [Protocol for Handling Technical Failures During Online Canvas Exams](#)

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The successful implementation of distance learning at Alcorn State University requires coordinated effort and clear accountability across multiple departments and roles. This section outlines the key responsibilities of each stakeholder in the distance learning ecosystem.

The Office of Academic Affairs provides overarching leadership and oversight of all distance education programs. Under the direction of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, this office ensures compliance with accreditation standards and regulatory requirements while maintaining academic quality across all delivery modes. It is responsible for reviewing and approving new distance education programs and courses and overseeing program evaluation and assessment processes.

The Center for Faculty/Staff Innovation is the primary support hub for online instruction. It is responsible for designing and implementing the Online Faculty Certification training program, providing ongoing professional development, and supporting faculty in course development. The Center monitors online faculty presence, conducts pre-course and end-of-semester evaluations, and maintains certification records. It also provides mentoring support for first-time online instructors to ensure successful course delivery.

Department Chairs are crucial in maintaining quality standards within their academic units. They ensure departmental governance for online courses, verify faculty compliance with distance learning policies, and monitor course quality. The chairs review student course evaluations and maintain observational access to online courses within their department. They work directly with faculty to address quality concerns and ensure course content meets accreditation and departmental standards.

Faculty members teaching online courses are responsible for ensuring course quality and student success. Before teaching online, faculty must complete the required certification training and maintain currency with educational technologies and pedagogical techniques. They are responsible for developing and delivering courses that maintain the same rigor as traditional courses while following university guidelines for online instruction. Faculty must regularly interact with students, grade assignments within established timeframes (5-7 days), and hold virtual office hours. They are expected to log into courses at least five days per week and respond to student inquiries within 24-48 hours. Faculty also must review their courses each semester for currency, observe copyright laws, and monitor academic integrity.

The Center for Information Technology Services (CITS) provides the technical infrastructure and support for distance learning. It maintains the Canvas learning management system, provides 24/7 helpdesk support, and ensures system reliability. CITS also deploys student course evaluations and provides technical orientation resources for online students.

Students in online courses have specific responsibilities for their learning success. They must verify they possess the required technical skills and equipment, complete course requirements by established deadlines, and maintain active participation to meet attendance requirements. Students are expected to follow university academic integrity policies, observe copyright laws, and maintain respectful online communication.

Several support services play vital roles in the distance learning environment. The J. D. Library provides online access to scholarly resources and research assistance. The Department of Health & Disability Services ensures course accessibility and coordinates accommodation for students with disabilities. The Alcorn Writing Center offers online consultations and supports students with various writing projects. The Title IX Office ensures compliance with federal requirements in the online environment and handles any reports of misconduct.

Each role is essential to creating a comprehensive and effective distance learning environment that maintains academic quality while supporting student success. Regular communication and coordination among these stakeholders ensure the continuous improvement of distance education at Alcorn State University.

6. Review

Distance education policies will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure they remain effective, relevant, and aligned with current educational practices, technology, and regulatory requirements. However, revisions and updates to this policy may be required more frequently to reflect changes in educational technology, institutional goals, and legal or accreditation requirements.

7. Revision made to this Policy

Date	Major, Minor or Editorial	Description of Revision(s)
02/2025	Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Policy: Added sections – Distance Education Training, State Authorization statement, ASU Student Complaint Process, Out of State Student Complaint Process, Online Course Review process, and Copyright and Fair Use statements. • New Policy: Updated Plagiarism statement for
02/2025	Editorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text format changes • Reworded responsibilities for clarity as needed • Removed references to "distance learning" and changed "distance education" for consistency • Updated bulleted list to full sentences for consistency • Updated references to "Online Training Program" to "Online Faculty Certification Course" • Updated Essential Elements and Optional Elements sections

8. Glossary of Terms/Definitions

Accessibility – is the quality or characteristic of being easy to approach, reach, enter, use, or understand by all people, regardless of their physical, sensory, cognitive, or technological abilities. It encompasses the design and provision of environments, products, services, and information in ways that enable everyone, including those with disabilities, to have equal access and participation.

Asynchronous Instruction – instructional activities that do not require instructors and students to be engaged at the same time.

Course Design Template – a university-approved template with common components, criteria, and guidelines that faculty can adapt to their needs and requirements for all online courses.

Course Evaluation Rubric – a set of standards used to determine the quality of an online course.

Course Instructional Design—Instructional Design refers to the analysis of learning needs and the systematic approach to developing an online course that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills to the learner using a variety of instructional methods that cater to multiple learning styles, strategies, and preferences. The four basic steps in instructional design include analysis, definition of goals and learning objectives, design of learning activities, and evaluation of course and student performance.

Distance Education – a formal synchronous or asynchronous educational event in which most 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.

Distance Education Course – an individual course where a proportion of instruction occurs when the student and the instructor are not in the same physical setting. The course is considered distance education if the student receives a significant portion of their instruction at a distance.

Distance Education Program – an approved collection of courses or a course of study where a student can earn 50% or more credits necessary to qualify for a degree through distance education.

Hybrid Course/Blended Instruction – an individual course that includes a combination of online (e.g., 49% online) and face-to-face (e.g., 51%) meetings and instruction.

Learning Management System (LMS) – a web-based software application that enables institutions to create and manage courses, lessons, assignments, assessments, and other materials in an online learning environment. Canvas Instructure is the LMS used at ASU.

Online Course – an individual course in which 100% of the instruction is delivered via distance education. Some online courses may require proctored testing at approved testing sites and/or other course activities such as practicum experiences.

Online Program – a fully online program where 100% of the courses are delivered online. For accreditation purposes, some programs may have attendance requirements for program completion, such as proctored examinations or practicum experiences.

Synchronous Instruction – instructional activities that require instructors and students to be engaged simultaneously.

Traditional Course – The course is delivered on-site with face-to-face interaction between the instructor and the student. The traditional course may be web-enhanced.

REVIEWED BY:

/s/ Sandra L. Barnes, Ph.D. March 17, 2025
Chair Date
Academic Governance Committee

/s/ Joyce Buckner-Brown, Ph.D., MHSA, RRT March 17, 2025
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Date

/s/ Alfred L. Galtney, J.D. March 17, 2025
Chief Compliance Officer Date

APPROVED:

/s/ Tracy M. Cook, Ed.D. March 17, 2025
President/IEO Date