

## 6.35 Distance Learning

**Last Revised:** May 2024

**Policy:** Piedmont Community College (PCC) is committed to similar success for students in Distance Learning (DL) courses and programs as for traditional face-to-face students.

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### **Purpose/Definitions:**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines regarding student learning via DL.

#### **Definitions**

**Blended**—college curriculum or continuing education course in which less than or equal to 50% of the instruction is delivered online.

**Distance Learning (DL)**—an approach to learning where instruction takes place outside the traditional classroom setting. Instructors use electronic or a blend of face-to-face and electronic delivery methods to develop and furnish content for instruction and interaction with students.

**Hybrid**—college curriculum or continuing education course in which greater than 50%, but less than 100% of the instruction is delivered online.

**Hyflex**—a multi-modal instructional delivery method where the College has the option to deliver the online portion of a curriculum course synchronously, asynchronously, or both as long as 100% of the instruction is offered face-to-face with the instructor in a physical classroom. Students may choose to attend the regularly scheduled in-person session or the online option on a session-by-session basis.

**Online**—college curriculum or continuing education course in which 100% of the instruction is delivered online either synchronously or asynchronously.

**Quality Matters**—an international, inter-institutional program that uses a set of approved rubrics to evaluate the quality of online courses.

**Traditional Instruction**—college curriculum or continuing education course in which 100% of the instruction is delivered face-to-face with the instructor in the physical presence of students.

**Approval Authority/Monitoring Authority:** Piedmont Community College's Board of Trustees has approval authority for this policy. The Vice President, Instruction has monitoring authority for this policy.

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**Procedure:**

Section 1: Quality Expectations

- 1.1. Distance learning conducted at PCC will comply with quality standards as outlined by the Department of Education and in accordance with the College's accrediting entity.
- 1.2. DL courses shall meet at least the same quality standards applicable to on-campus instruction as well as quality standards specifically applicable to distance learning instruction.
- 1.3. For degree-seeking students, the same policies concerning admissions requirements, scholastic standards, and other administrative processes apply to distance learning programs as they do for on-campus programs.
- 1.4. All courses, including distance learning courses, will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis by the appropriate instructional dean (or designee) and evaluation results will be used for continuous program improvement. This should follow procedures similar to those in effect for face-to-face courses.
- 1.5. PCC utilizes the Quality Matters rubric as a guideline for course development and delivery.

Section 2: Requirements and Expectations for DL Faculty

- 2.1. As with traditional courses, PCC's faculty shall assume primary responsibility for and exercise oversight over DL instruction, ensuring both the rigor of courses, curriculum, and the quality of instruction.
- 2.2. Faculty should respond to email correspondence from students within a 24-hour period during the work week (i.e., Monday-Friday, excluding holidays).
  - 2.2.1. Preferred methods of communication should be listed in the syllabus.

- 2.3. Faculty should exhibit due diligence in monitoring student progress and make efforts to contact and engage students who are exhibiting difficulties in the course.
- 2.4. Instructional design should reflect best practice quality standards and provide for a consistent environment and learning experience for students.
  - 2.4.1. Faculty should strive to meet the diverse needs of students and ensure active learning in DL coursework by incorporating a variety of course experiences that address diverse learning styles.

Section 3: Faculty Qualifications

- 3.1. All faculty teaching courses with an online component shall be required to demonstrate competency in online instruction and responsibly facilitate online instruction.

Section 4: Census Data

- 4.1. To continue in an online course, students are required to complete an assignment on or before the census (10%) point of the semester.
  - 4.1.1. To continue in a course with an online component, students must complete an enrollment verification assignment.
  - 4.1.2. Instructors will record the date of each student's first submitted assignment on the attendance roster in the student portal.

Section 5: Training

- 5.1. For courses with an online component, the DL staff will provide training regarding course design and implementation.

Section 6: Approval Process for Distance Delivery

- 6.1. To encourage high quality course offerings, proposals for creating new courses with an online component and proposals for converting existing courses to a distance format will be given careful review.
  - 6.1.1. Faculty will work with their instructional dean and DL staff to coordinate the conversion.
  - 6.1.2. New courses with an online component should be approved no later than the semester prior to the semester of delivery, to allow for sufficient course development.

Section 7: Course Design

- 7.1. Faculty will work with the DL staff to design online components of courses that meet Quality Matters standards.
- 7.2. To provide a consistent online experience for the student, faculty shall follow the College's Learning Management System (LMS) template.
- 7.3. Courses designed for DL delivery must reflect contact hours and instructional time commitments in accordance with PCC's expected student learning outcomes that are equivalent to those for the same courses delivered through traditional formats.
- 7.4. The course syllabus must use the accessible syllabus template provided by DL staff.

Section 8: Online Course Design Practices for Accessibility

- 8.1. Online course content should provide accessible text and images in files, documents, LMS pages, videos, and web pages to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- 8.2. When links to external Web sites are provided to students within an online component of a course, the portion of those external sites intended for student viewing should be reviewed for conformance with the guidelines listed above.

Section 9: Course Load, Compensation, Ownership of Materials, and Copyright

- 9.1. Courses with an online component are typically part of the faculty member's regular teaching load, with the same rate of compensation as traditional courses.
- 9.2. Courses with an online component may also be taught as an overload, at the same rate of compensation as traditional courses taught as an overload.
- 9.3. Any exceptions (e.g., reassigned time for developing courses using new distance technologies) are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and as per current procedure, must be approved by the instructional dean and Vice President, Instruction.
- 9.4. Faculty who develop courses share ownership with the College.
  - 9.4.1. The instructor has ownership of the course and if the faculty member leaves employment with the College, PCC shall retain the right to continue using the course.
- 9.5. Faculty must keep in mind copyright, trademark, and licensing issues when designing DL courses and therefore should be familiar with PCC's Copyright and Fair Use Policy (Policy 2.16).

Section 10: Student Authentication

- 10.1. PCC uses a secure login and pass code student identification method as an attempt to ensure that the student who registers in a DL course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the associated credit for the course or program.
  - 10.1.1. At the time of enrollment, students receive a unique username (secure login) and password (secure pass code).
  - 10.1.2. The username and password are used for student identification/authentication purposes for DL course work at no extra cost to the student, with both the username and password used for work submitted online.
- 10.2. The College has systems in place that ensure the users seeking assistance provide identifying documents, such as but not limited to, student ID number, date of birth, or e-mail address verifying their identity before troubleshooting. This practice ensures that only the actual student of record is given access to the course content.
  - 10.2.1. In addition to the secure username and password method, faculty may use proctored exams to authenticate the work of distance learning students. PCC uses a tool which locks down a student's browser while they take a test and has a video monitoring option. PCC Nursing faculty use ExamSoft, an online proctoring tool.
- 10.3. If a faculty member chooses to use additional means of authenticating the work of DL students, students must be informed in writing of any actual and/or projected associated obligations.

Section 11: Student Support

- 11.1. In the case of hybrid and blended courses, information regarding the portion 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.
- 11.2. PCC students enrolled in distance learning will have access to academic support, including tutoring, library services, advising, course registration, and financial aid assistance appropriate for distance learning students.
  - 11.2.1. Technology assistance is available through the IT helpdesk.

Section 12: Student Privacy

- 12.1. Student privacy in all courses and programs regardless of delivery format is protected as per PCC Policy 7.6 The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.
- 12.2. The College maintains security measures to protect and back up student records. (See PCC Policies 2.23 Technology Resources Acceptable Use and 2.24 Information Access Security.)

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**Legal Citation:** [1B SBCCC 100.1](#); [1G SBCCC 200.93](#)

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**History:** Approved April 2017; Revised June 2021, May 2024

Cross-references PCC Policies 2.16 Copyright and Fair Use, 2.23 Technology Resources Acceptable Use, 2.24 Information Access Security, and 7.6 The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974