

## **Policy Preamble and Commentary**

The Lincoln University Distance Learning Committee convened in the Fall of 2016 to evaluate and redefine the Online Education Policy to meet the online learning and educational needs of Lincoln University. The committee last revised the policy in the Spring of 2016. Most recently, the committee worked to ensure the policy covered many concerns identified by the faculty regarding online learning. Next, the committee met with the Provost, Dr. Patricia Ramsey, to establish a baseline for the vision of distance education at Lincoln University and discussed the need for additional support from the university to help guide the process. From there, we updated the policy taking into consideration the current Lincoln University policies for course and curriculum approval and evaluated ways to ensure Lincoln delivers online education with fidelity. While reading the document, please understand that the committee worked with the standing policies identified in the CBA and stayed clear of using different language. All in all, this plan merely serves as a guide before specific implementation procedures. Hence, the Distance Learning Committee at Lincoln University feels confident we are meeting the needs of the students, faculty, administrators, and Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

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# **Lincoln University**

## **Online Education Policy**

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## I. DEFINITIONS

- A. Online Education:** Online education (OE) is a formal educational process by which part or all of the instruction and interaction between the student and instructor utilize web-based technologies. OE includes online courses, hybrid courses and web-enhanced courses. Online learning may be conducted synchronously (instructor and student interacting with one another and course material simultaneously but separated by location), or asynchronously (instructor and student interacting with one another and the course material at different times), or a combination of the two.
- B. Online Courses:** Online courses are courses that utilize web-based technology, such as a Learning Management System (Moodle, Blackboard, etc.), to supplant all of the face-to-face classroom work.
- C. Hybrid Courses:** When the technologies used for education and communication outside of the classroom are used to supplant some of the classroom work, reducing the time actually spent in the classroom, the result is a hybrid course. For purposes of this policy, hybrid courses are defined as those in which the student time out of the face-to-face classroom is more than 50% but less than 100%.
- D. Web-Enhanced Classes:** Web-enhanced (WE) classes are courses that utilize distance learning technologies, but require student time out of the physical classroom (face-to-face) less than 50 percent. These are not considered Online courses nor Hybrid courses.
- E. Online Program:** An online program is an academic program with 100% of the communication and curriculum content for a degree or certificate offered through the use of the Internet, the University's learning management system and Web-based technologies.

## II. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY

- A. Purpose:** The purpose of Lincoln University's Online Education Policy is to assure the highest quality online education and to ensure that the procedures for approving online education courses, selecting faculty, and assessing course and program outcomes are designed accordingly.
- B. Standards and Best Practices:** Online learning activities should comply with best practices and standards to ensure that the online courses and programs meet the same quality standards as those that apply to campus-based instruction as required by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

- C. Oversight of Online Education:** The Provost is responsible for the quality of online education with assistance from Deans and administrative units directly overseeing online education activities. Oversight of online education will be provided by the Director of Online Education in consultation with the Distance Learning Committee and in keeping with University practices.

### **III. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

- A. Student Readiness:** Any student wishing to enroll in online or hybrid courses must first successfully complete an orientation to online learning. It is recommended that all students also take an online readiness evaluation. It is the student's responsibility to meet technical requirements as established by the University.
- B. Academic Standards of Online Education Courses:** Online education courses are subject to the same academic standards and policies as face-to-face courses.
- C. Approval of Online Education Courses:** The approval process for online courses and programs follows the standard University protocol for face-to-face courses.
- D. Course and Program Offerings:** As with all University academic offerings, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the academic deans are responsible for giving final approval.
- E. Course Review:** Online education offerings will be evaluated using the same assessment cycle and course evaluation process as all University courses.
- F. Faculty Responsibility:** Consistent with the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), the instructor has the same responsibility as for any University course or program. The instructor is also responsible for timely communication with students and review of course effectiveness in an online learning format. Best practices call for student enrollees' queries to be answered within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours during weekends and holidays.
- G. Accessibility:** Lincoln University will ensure that courses are compliant with all current federal guidelines for accessibility, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the U.S. Federal IT Accessibility Initiative.
- H. Intellectual Property:** See CBA between Lincoln University and Lincoln University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (LUC-AAUP).
- I. Academic Integrity:** The University policy concerning academic integrity applies to online education courses.

- J. Copyright Compliance:** Instructors are expected to adhere to U.S. Title 17 copyright law.
- K. Online Learning Course Exams:** Proctored exams may be required, at the discretion of the instructor. If not proctored, other measures should be taken to prevent cheating.

#### **IV. FACULTY**

- A. Faculty Qualifications:** Faculty members who wish to teach online education courses must meet the same qualifications as other instructors at the University, and must also be certified as indicated in Section IV B.
- B. Faculty Training and Online Teaching Qualifications:** Faculty teaching a hybrid or online course must have received certification in online teaching or show experience as stated below. The University will provide the necessary training for faculty to teach online.
  - i. If an instructor has taught online courses elsewhere or received online teaching certification, the faculty member must submit a copy of the certificate, syllabi, course plans, assessments and any other pertinent course materials as requested by the Distance Learning Committee, or share the course URL. The department Chair and Dean will review and approve qualifications on the recommendation of the Distance Learning Committee.
- C. Faculty Evaluation:** Course evaluations are completed for online education courses just as they are for face-to-face courses.
- D. Faculty Teaching Load:** Full-time faculty teaching online education classes are subject to the same workload conditions as faculty teaching face-to-face courses as set forth in the CBA.

#### **V. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

Online education students apply for admission, financial aid, and register for online classes as do all students. All academic student support services offered to on-campus students are also offered to online students. See Appendix for The Middle States Commission on Higher Education Distance Education Programs: Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning).

## VI. TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES

The University has committed sufficient resources to online education programs and related services to ensure their effectiveness. Online education courses and programs are developed and offered by the same academic units that offer face-to-face programs.

- A. Online Education Equipment and Facilities:** The University ensures access to the necessary online education facilities, necessary software and hardware, along with the necessary support.
- B. Institutional Technology Responsibility:** The Office of Information Technology provides the technical expertise necessary to maintain online education equipment and networks, including online helpdesk for technical support for students and faculty.
- C. Technical Support:** The University will provide students and faculty with access to 24-hour technical support.

## VII. PLANNING AND EVALUATION

- A. Institutional Planning:** Online learning is included in the overall planning process and organizational structure for the University, as addressed in the University's mission, strategic initiatives, goals, and objectives.
- B. Educational Effectiveness:** Online education courses and programs are assessed to ensure their comparability with face-to-face campus programs. They are included in the University's annual assessment as part of the departmental and school assessment.

## Appendix

### **The Middle States Commission on Higher Education *Distance Education Programs: Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)* As Outlined on MSCHE.org.**

#### **The Hallmarks of Quality**

##### **1. Online learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes (MSCHE Standard 1).**

###### **Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ The mission statement explains the role of online learning within the range of the institution's programs and services;
- \_ Institutional and program statements of vision and values inform how the online learning environment is created and supported;
- \_ As appropriate, the institution incorporates into its online learning programs methods of meeting the stated institutional goals for the student experience at the institution;
- \_ The recruitment and admissions programs supporting the online learning courses and programs appropriately target the student populations to be served;
- \_ The students enrolled in the institution's online learning courses and programs fit the admissions requirements for the students the institution intends to serve;
- \_ Senior administrators and staff can articulate how online learning is consonant with the institution's mission and goals.

##### **2. The institution's plans for developing, sustaining, and, if appropriate, expanding online learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes (MSCHE Standard 2).**

###### **Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ Development and ownership of plans for online learning extend beyond the administrators directly responsible for it and the programs directly using it;
- \_ Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase numbers of programs provided through online learning courses and programs and/or numbers of students to be enrolled in them;



- \_ Plans for online learning are linked effectively to budget and technology planning to ensure adequate support for current and future offerings;
- \_ Plans for expanding online learning demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality;
- \_ The institution and its online learning programs have a track record of conducting needs analysis and of supporting programs.

### **3. Online learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance and academic oversight (MSCHE Standard 4).**

#### **Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ The institution's faculty have a designated role in the design and implementation of its online learning offerings;
- \_ The institution ensures the rigor of the offerings and the quality of the instruction;
- \_ Approval of online courses and programs follows standard processes used in the college or university;
- \_ Online learning courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis;
- \_ Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the institution can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all online learning offerings provided under its name.

### **4. Curricula for the institution's online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.**

#### **Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ The curricular goals and course objectives show that the institution or program has knowledge of the best uses of online learning in different disciplines and settings;
- \_ Curricula delivered through online learning are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs, if provided by the institution, or those provided by traditional institutions;
- \_ The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses and is effectively defined in easily available documents including course syllabi and program descriptions;

\_ Scheduling of online learning courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees;

\_ The institution or program has established and enforces a policy on online learning course enrollments to ensure faculty capacity to work appropriately with students;

\_ Expectations for any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work) are stated clearly;

\_ Course design and delivery supports student-student and faculty-student interaction;

\_ Curriculum design and the course management system enable active faculty contribution to the learning environment;

\_ Course and program structures provide schedule and support known to be effective in helping online learning students persist and succeed.

**5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which the online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.**

**Analysis/Evidence:**

\_ Assessment of student learning follows processes used in onsite courses or programs and/or reflects good practice in assessment methods;

\_ Student course evaluations are routinely taken and an analysis of them contributes to strategies for course improvements;

\_ Evaluation strategies ensure effective communication between faculty members who design curriculum, faculty members who interact with students, and faculty members who evaluate student learning;

\_ The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in online courses and uses the results for improvement;

\_ The institution demonstrates the appropriate use of technology to support its assessment strategies;

\_ The institution documents its successes in implementing changes informed by its programs of assessment and evaluation;

- \_ The institution provides examples of student work and student interactions among themselves and with faculty;
- \_ The institution sets appropriate goals for the retention/persistence of students using online learning, assesses its achievement of these goals, and uses the results for improvement.

**6. Faculty responsible for delivering the online learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the online learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.**

**Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ Online learning faculties are carefully selected, appropriately trained, frequently evaluated, and are marked by an acceptable level of turnover;
- \_ The institution's training program for online learning faculty is periodic, incorporates tested good practices in online learning pedagogy, and ensures competency with the range of software products used by the institution;
- \_ Faculty are proficient and effectively supported in using the course management system;
- \_ The office or persons responsible for online learning training programs are clearly identified and have the competencies to accomplish the tasks, including knowledge of the specialized resources and technical support available to support course development and delivery;
- \_ Faculty members engaged in online learning share in the mission and goals of the institution and its programs and are provided the opportunities to contribute to the broader activities of the institution;
- \_ Students express satisfaction with the quality of the instruction provided by online learning faculty members.

**7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.**

**Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ The institution's admissions program for online learning provides good web-based information to students about the nature of the online learning environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in online learning;
- \_ The institution provides an online learning orientation program;

- \_ The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the online learning program;
- \_ Students in online learning programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, course registration, and career and placement counseling;
- \_ Students in online learning programs have ready access to 24/7 tech support;
- \_ Students using online learning have adequate access to learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories, and equipment and tracking systems;
- \_ Students using online learning demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources;
- \_ Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically;
- \_ Publications and advertising for online learning programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty;
- \_ Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution's system of student authentication.

**8. The institution provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its online learning offerings.**

**Analysis/Evidence:**

- \_ The institution prepares a multi-year budget for online learning that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, and technology infrastructure;
- \_ The institution provides evidence of a multi-year technology plan that addresses its goals for online learning and includes provision for a robust and scalable technical infrastructure.

## 9. The institution assures the integrity of its online offerings\*.

### Analysis/Evidence:

\_ The institution has in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The institution makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. **(Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programs *must* demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)**;

\_ The institution's policies on academic integrity include explicit references to online learning;

\_ Issues of academic integrity are discussed during the orientation for online students;

\_ Training for faculty members engaged in online learning includes consideration of issues of academic integrity, including ways to reduce cheating.

\*Institutions are encouraged to consult *Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education*, prepared by WCET and available at <http://www.wcet.wiche.edu>