



DISTANCE EDUCATION POLICY

SCOPE

This policy applies to all university departments involved in the administration of WTU distance learning programs, including Academic Affairs, Student Services, and Finance.

POLICY STATEMENT

In alignment with its mission, Washington Technology University provides distance education – quality instruction through information and communication technologies – to increase access to the university’s offerings and serve the higher education needs of a diverse community of learners. This policy outlines standards and processes for the administration of distance learning including the development, delivery, and evaluation of distance learning courses. The standards are aligned with the distance learning requirements codified in WA 250-61-100(1), which were taken from the Council of Regional Accrediting Commission’s ‘Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education.’

DEFINITIONS

Distance Education: is the process whereby on-campus and off-campus learners access lectures, course materials, resources, instructor/student and student/student interaction via synchronous or asynchronous electronic communication technologies. The digital tools used at WTU for this purpose include a Learning Management System (LMS), a digital library, and web conferencing.

Distance-delivered Courses: are those via which 60% or more of the instruction and interaction occurs via distance learning.

Distance-delivered Programs: are those via which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken via distance learning. If a student has the option of earning at least 50% of the program’s required credits by taking distance-delivered courses, the program is a distance-delivered program.

POLICY

A. Standards for Distance Education at WTU

1) WTU employs distance learning to serve its mission and purposes

- a) Through public documents and statements, WTU will articulate how its distance learning initiatives support its mission which includes the delivery of a “rigorous learning environment and a culture of innovation.”
- b) WTU’s recruitment and admissions practices will serve students who may benefit from access to distance education, including those in underserved areas, those who are otherwise less able to attend on-campus classes, and those who believe they learn more effectively in this modality.

- 2) WTU's plans for developing, sustaining, and expanding online learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes**
 - a) Distance learning is incorporated into WTU's strategic planning processes.
 - b) The strategic planning process will include an evaluation of WTU's capacity to assure appropriate quality before offering or expanding distance learning programs.
 - c) In combination, the evaluation, planning, and budgeting processes will provide for appropriate levels of qualified faculty, staff, professional development, digital library resources, student services, and technology infrastructure to assure appropriate quality of distance learning.

- 3) Online learning is incorporated into WTU's systems of governance and academic oversight**
 - a) The development and approval of distance learning curricula, courses, and programs follows the same processes as those for on-campus courses and programs.
 - b) The chair of the sponsoring department, program director, and teaching faculty are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the course content, delivery, and student academic conduct.
 - c) Reasonable measures are taken to prevent, identify, and address academic dishonesty in online learning environments.

- 4) The curricula of WTU's online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats**
 - a) The targeted learning outcomes for a course offered online are equivalent to those of that course offered onsite. Should the medium not allow for those outcomes to be acquired and demonstrated, the course will not be made available online.
 - b) To the extent possible, the curricula and assessment for a distance learning course will be the same as those of the equivalent course delivered on campus, allowing for differences where adjusting for the medium of delivery offers benefits.
 - c) Courses are organized and structured consistently and logically and incorporate intuitive navigation to facilitate student learning.

- 5) WTU 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**
 - a) Student course evaluations are conducted on completion of each course, and responses are analyzed to inform revisions to curriculum and instruction.
 - b) Measures of student success in online classes, including participation, academic performance and completion rates, will be compared with those generated by on-campus classes. Significant differences will be analyzed and addressed with modifications to curricula and instructional practices.
 - c) The delivery and effectiveness of academic, technical, and other student support provided to distance education students will be recorded and analyzed to inform the ongoing improvement of these services.

- 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

- a) To qualify to teach online course, a faculty member must meet the same academic credential requirements as are required to teach that course on-campus.
- b) The Director of E-learning provides initial training (new faculty orientation), ongoing support, and shares best practices in online instruction with online teaching faculty.
- c) The Director of E-learning works directly with each online instructor prior to and during each course to assist preparation, teaching, and the use of assessment instruments.

7) WTU provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings

- a) During the admissions process, advisors discuss with applicants the personal skills and dispositions associated with success in online learning, the technology requirements, and expected time commitments to assist the applicant in determining if the format is right for them.
- b) The Director of E-learning provides orientation, training materials, and ongoing support to students undertaking distance learning.
- c) Students undertaking distance education have the same library and other resources available to them as do on-campus students.
- d) Technical support is available to assist students in accessing and using the online learning platforms.
- e) Where possible, students can access services or request access to a service online. For example, to initiate a complaint, request a transcript, or enroll in classes.

8) WTU provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its online learning offerings

- a) Per 2.(c): In combination, the evaluation, planning, and budgeting processes will provide for appropriate levels of qualified faculty, staff, professional development, digital library resources, student services, and technology infrastructure to assure appropriate quality of distance learning.

9) WTU assures the integrity of its online offerings

- a) Distance education students are required to attend student orientation which includes academic conduct and expectations as they relate to online learning.
- b) WTU implements procedures to ensure that the enrolled student is the same person who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit.
- c) WTU takes reasonable measures to secure student data and protect student privacy.