

Distance Education Policy

Subject	Academic Affairs
Web Link	https://www.montana.edu/policy/distance-education
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Responsible Party	Office of the Provost

Contents

[100.00 Introduction](#)

[200.00 Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[300.00 Operational Requirements](#)

100.00 Introduction

Distance Education at Montana State University refers to the delivery of instruction primarily via electronic, web-based technologies or other media regardless of the student or the instructor's location. Delivery can be synchronous or asynchronous, can include some face-to-face interaction and must incorporate regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors. All distance education programs must be consistent with the mission and educational objectives of the institution.

Montana State University adheres to the Distance Education courses and programs definitions as defined in the Board of Regents Policy 303.7 Online Learning.

200.00 Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities for distance education programs and courses follow the policies set forth for traditional programs and courses.

210.00 Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

The Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs will oversee distance education in coordination with Deans, Vice President for Administration, Vice-President for Student Success and Vice President for Information Technology.

220.00 University

The university will provide training regarding course design and implementation for distance education. The university will provide training for the official MSU learning management system and other digital tools used for instruction.

Training will be available via onsite and virtual classes and through individual consultations. Training will be provided in a format that prepares faculty to develop courses that are in accordance with the [Principles of Quality for ELearning Courses in the MUS](#) and the Consortium for Regional Accrediting Commission's 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines.

The University will provide opportunities for faculty to participate in activities designed to enhance distance education programs and courses. Faculty performance in distance education courses will be evaluated by the same standards used to assess the quality of face-to-face teaching during annual reviews, retention, tenure and promotion reviews.

The University will provide technical support including instructional technology staff, instructional design staff, and helpdesk for technical support for faculty and students.

The University will maintain a Distance Education website with general information on distance education programs and appropriate contacts for the students and faculty.

230.00 Faculty

231.00 Training and Implementation

Faculty are required to complete the two types of training outlined in this policy prior to the start of the first term in which they are the instructor of record:

- Instructional Technology training that incorporates appropriate enterprise tools available for enhancing online learning, including the official MSU learning management system. (Academic Technology and Outreach)
- Distance education pedagogy training (Center for Faculty Excellence)

Pre-classroom training exceptions require Provost approval.

To enhance accessibility and effectiveness for the students, faculty will:

- deliver distance education programs and courses using the official MSU learning management system.
- follow the Principles of Quality for eLearning Courses in the Montana University System.

232.00 Regular and Substantive Interaction

All distance education programs and courses must provide regular and substantive interaction between the instructor(s) and the students, and between students. “Regular” is defined as providing the opportunity for interactions with the student on a scheduled and predictable basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course. “Substantive” means students are engaged through teaching, learning, and assessment as well as at least two of these five activities:

- providing direct instruction
- assessing or providing feedback on a student’s course work
- providing information or responding to questions about the content course or competency
- facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency
- other instructional activities approved by the institution’s or program’s accrediting agency

Regular and substantive interaction requirements are not satisfied when interactions are limited to:

- grading assignments without supplying specific feedback to the individual student
- relying solely on student-initiated requests for engagement with the instructor

Regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in distance education focuses on factors that differentiate distance education from correspondence courses. Distance education programs and courses shall meet the following criteria:

- Instructors engage in at least two forms of substantive interaction
- program and course designs incorporate the ability to monitor each student's engagement and allow substantial engagement with students based on that monitoring
- instructors are responsive to students' requests for instructional support

- peer to peer student interaction is encouraged through active learning assignments, group assignments and discussion threads

233.00 Faculty Office Hours for Students

Each instructor should maintain virtual office hours every week during each semester to accommodate student consultations. Instructors should post these hours on the syllabus and the learning management system. A minimum of one hour of scheduled virtual office hours a week is required for each online course section taught by an instructor. For distance courses, instructors may use various modes of synchronous online communication and are encouraged to use MSU supported online communication tools (e.g., WebEx and Teams). All scheduled office hours should adhere to the guidelines outlined in the Faculty Responsibilities Policy section 3.s

(https://www.montana.edu/policy/faculty_handbook/faculty_responsibilities.html).

234.00 Course Load and Compensation

Distance learning courses are part of a faculty member's regular teaching load, with the same rate of compensation as face-to-face courses. See the MSU and colleges' Workload Policies regarding tenure track and the Collective Bargaining agreement regarding non-tenure track faculty.

300.00 Operational Requirements

310.00 Quality and Learning Goals

Course quality and learning goals for distance education courses are consistent with the expectations for all courses at MSU.

320.00 Transition from Face-to-Face Delivery to Distance Education Delivery

Existing approved academic programs modified to a distance delivery format must follow the campus approval process and submit for Level 1 Board of Regents approval/notification. NWCCU will be notified of any intent to transition an approved program to Distance Education Delivery.

330.00 Review and Approval of Newly Proposed Distance Education Programs

Faculty have a substantive role in the review and approval of all curricula at Montana State University through the established shared governance process. Alignment with the mission of the University, existing programs and courses will be considered at all review stages for academic programs. MSU will seek approval from NWCCU when intending to establish a new distance education program. New distance education programs follow the same University and Board of Regents approval process as all academic programs.

340.00 Assessment of Distance Education Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes for programs and coursework delivered through distance education will be assessed as part of the existing Program Assessment, Program Review and Program Accreditation reporting system. Programs and courses will maintain the same quality and learning objectives regardless of delivery modality. Student success measures will be collected and used to inform modifications to improve student success. Existing policies addressing instruction apply to distance education programs and courses.

350.00 Identity Verification and Student Privacy

MSU requires student documents and records for admission come direct from a secure source. A student record with a unique username and password is created upon admission. All enrolled students must use the unique username and password obtained through the University to access course materials. Sharing usernames and passwords is a violation of MSU Enterprise IT policy, [MUS policy 1304.1 and 1306](#), (<https://mus.edu/borpol/bor1300/>), and [MSU Student Code of Student Conduct 330.30](#) (https://www.montana.edu/policy/student_conduct/#conductcode).

360.00 Compliance with MSU Policies and Procedures.

All MSU courses and programs must comply with establish MSU Policies and Procedures, namely:

1. provide all program and course materials according to the [MSU Student Accommodations Policy](#) and the [MSU Web Accessibility policy](#);
2. follow intellectual property policy as defined by [MUS BOR Policy 401.3](#) and [MSU Faculty Handbook Intellectual Property Policy](#) ;
3. require all software vendors to adhere to the [MSU Data Stewardship Policy](#) ;
4. administer the learning management system in ways to insure the protection of student privacy; and
5. maintain student privacy in accordance with [MSU FERPA policy](#) for student privacy.

Referenced links in 360.00:

1. <https://www.montana.edu/policy/Universitystudentaccommodationsandappealspolicy.html> and
https://www.montana.edu/policy/enterprise_it/web_accessibility_policy.html
2. <https://mus.edu/borpol/bor400/401-3.pdf> and
https://www.montana.edu/policy/faculty_handbook/intellectual_property.html
3. https://www.montana.edu/policy/enterprise_it/data_stewardship.html
4. None.
5. https://www.montana.edu/policy/family_ed_privacy_act/

370.00 Consumer Protections

MSU is a member of NC-SARA and maintains compliance with all NC-SARA requirements regarding notifications, consumer protection disclosures, and a primary point of contact to address concerns for distance education students.

380.00 Tuition and Fees

MSU will determine and regularly review tuition and fees in accordance with Board of Regents policy associated with Distance Education courses and programs. Tuition and fees will be posted on publicly accessible MSU tuition and fee websites. Students applying for admission to Distance Education programs will be notified of the program cost, course materials cost, and any applicable fees before registration.