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Purpose of the Handbook

The Distance Learning Faculty Handbook is a supplement to the University Faculty Handbook. It serves as a resource to faculty with information about federal and accreditation requirements for distance learning, University policies and processes that relate to distance education, guidelines for developing and teaching online and hybrid courses, and information on technology for distance education. Hyperlinks to pertinent documents and websites are provided throughout the text, and faculty are encouraged to review those. Every attempt has been made to ensure that the materials found within do not duplicate either the University Faculty Handbook or other Supplemental Handbooks. Please refer to those Handbooks for information about general University and College/School Policies and Procedures.
Distance Learning at Mercer University

As a university committed to excellence and innovation, Mercer offers a limited number of distance learning courses and programs in order to make the University accessible to more students. By offering these programs and courses, the University has been able to extend its role and mission beyond its campus boundaries, educating and empowering students and working professionals to serve their own communities.

Defining Distance Learning

Distance learning is when the majority (more than 50%) of the instruction occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are not in the same place. Distance learning courses and programs at Mercer are offered in one of two formats: Online or Hybrid. Online courses and programs are conducted fully online. There are no requirements for face-to-face on-campus experiences, such as classes, meetings, or weekend seminars. Program specific orientations that are one-time and on-campus are allowed. Hybrid courses and programs require some face-to-face on-campus experiences, including classes, meetings, and weekend seminars. A program that conducts all of its classes online but requires students to come to campus for anything other than orientation is considered hybrid.

Distance Learning Committee

The Provost-appointed University Distance Learning Committee, with faculty members from all colleges/schools and administrative representatives from the Department of Information Technology and from all administrative departments providing services to distance education students, meets regularly and, in its advisory capacity, makes recommendations to the Provost. The committee reviews curriculum proposals for distance learning programs as requested by the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils of the University, monitors the effectiveness of technology and technology support, academic and student support services, faculty development and student training opportunities, and communication to distance education students to ensure a quality distance learning experience comparable to that provided in Mercer’s face-to-face courses.

Role of Faculty in Distance Education at Mercer

The faculty and deans assume primary responsibility for and exercise oversight of distance education at Mercer ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction. The faculty members of record for distance education courses at Mercer are the same faculty who teach on-campus, and each college/school ensures that those who teach distance courses have knowledge of distance teaching and learning. Faculty members and deans are expected to work together continuously to evaluate and improve all distance learning courses and programs within their respective college/school by reviewing results of online course evaluation surveys and program outcome assessment results. Like all academic programs, results of the assessments and evaluations are documented in the University’s assessment record in Compliance Assist.
Distance Learning Website

The University maintains a Distance Learning Website with information for prospective and current students. Faculty are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the content and resources available on the website. It contains information about current online and hybrid programs, admissions, registration, student services, and technology support. The site also serves as a source for information about Mercer’s compliance with federal regulations that relate to state authorization (discussed in detail below).
Accreditation Requirements and Federal Regulations for Distance Education

Mercer University not only adheres to the policies for distance education course and programs set forth by its accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), it also follows other federal regulations that pertain to distance education. Below you will find the SACSCOC Policy Statements and Standards for distance education. Many of the policy statements are tied to federal regulations, and where appropriate these regulations have been noted. At the end of this section there is information about federal regulations regarding state authorization and consumer protection.

SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy

Mercer is required by SACSCOC to demonstrate that it meets the following policy standards that relate to distance education (a .pdf of the policy document is available here):

1. The institution demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or course work by using methods such as (1) secure login and pass code, (2) proctored examinations, and (3) new and other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification. (See also Federal Requirement 4.8 of the Principles of Accreditation)
2. The institution demonstrates that it has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses of programs. (See also Federal Requirement 4.8 of the Principles of Accreditation)
3. The institution demonstrates that it has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identify. (See also Federal Requirement 4.8 of the Principles of Accreditation)
4. An institution that offers distance or correspondence education must ensure that it reports accurate headcount enrollment on its annual Institutional Profile submitted to the Commission.
5. Institutions must ensure that their distance and correspondence education courses and programs comply with the Principles of Accreditation.

The Distance Education policy statement also provides Guidelines in the Application of the Principles of Accreditation to Distance and Correspondence Education (see Appendix A). Institutions are encouraged to utilize the Guidelines in implementing and reporting on distance education programs. Faculty are encouraged to review the Guidelines to ensure that distance education programs and courses they teach meet the Principles of Accreditation.

State Authorization

In order to offer distance education programs and courses to out-of-state residents, Mercer is required to obtain authorization from various state regulatory agencies. The process to obtain state
authorization varies from simple and low cost to highly complex and expensive, and the consequence for not complying with the requirements is litigation. The Federal Government is also seeking to tie an institution’s ability to offer financial aid to being authorized in a student’s state. Thus it is imperative for Mercer to adhere to any applicable state regulations before enrolling out-of-state distance learners.

Mercer has received authorizations, waivers, and exemptions from most states, territories, and protectorates, however, the University’s compliance hinges on limitations placed on the kinds of experiences in which distance learners can engage. This includes prohibiting student participation in an internship, externship or other field experience, especially those that relate to licensure. While most faculty won’t ever deal with issues of state authorization, program coordinators and deans must be aware of the current status of state authorization and the attendant limitations. The State Authorization page of the Distance Learning Website provides a comprehensive list of states where Mercer can enroll out-of-state students and provides information on restrictions for field-based experiences.

The requirements of authorization can also be met through participation in a regional or national reciprocity agreement. The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) seeks to establish a state-level reciprocity process on a national scale. SARA is a voluntary agreement, administered through the Regional Education compacts, that seeks to provide a uniform, effective and efficient system for authorization. Institutions are ineligible to join SARA unless their state participates, and due to statutory issues Georgia has not yet elected to join. Participation in SARA requires that the University follow the C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education and Mercer has incorporated those into its policies and procedures that relate to distance learning.

Since national reciprocity is not yet available, the University has joined a regional reciprocity agreement administered by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), our regional education compact. Participation in the SREB Electronic Campus Reciprocity Agreement requires that the University meet the SREB’s Principles of Good Practice and like the C-RAC Guidelines, Mercer has incorporated these into the distance learning policies and procedures. There are several states where Mercer has only obtained authorization through regional reciprocity (Alabama, Arkansas, and Maryland). Thus for residents of those states, only those courses and programs offered through the SREB Electronic Campus are available. Please refer to the State Authorization page of the Distance Learning Website for more information.

**Complaint Process for Out of State Distance Learners**

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act includes regulations regarding consumer protection for students. Students have the right to file a complaint against an institution when the requirements of state authorization are not followed or regarding the loss of tuition and fees as a result of unfair business practices (this complaint process does not apply to the academic grievances outlined in the Student Handbook). Institutions must provide both current and prospective students with contact information for filing complaints with its accrediting body and the appropriate state agency. For their
part of the regulation, states are required to identify an agency to address complaints made by out-of-state distance learners.

Mercer maintains a Complaint Process page as a part of the Distance Learning Website where students can access information on filing a complaint. It is important to note that in states where the University is exempt from seeking authorization, student grievances are often not addressed by an agency of that state. In most cases, state complaint procedures require the student to exhaust all complaint avenues internal to the institution before filing at the state or accrediting agency level. Faculty are therefore advised to instruct students to first address complaints through the Grievance Policies and Procedures outlined in the Student Handbook before filing with the appropriate state agency.
Mercer Policies and Processes for Distance Education

The University has policies and processes in place that apply specifically to distance education. These are applied from the inception of a program or course to its conclusion, and they have implications for the way distance learning courses are taught and evaluated.

Distance Education Addendum

In order to gain approval to offer a current or new program in an online or hybrid format, Mercer requires that program directors and administrators file a Distance Education Addendum with the University Curriculum Proposal Forms. The addendum asks the following questions:

1. What is the rationale for delivering this program via distance technologies?
2. Does the program already exist in a traditional format? Will the existing program continue to operate side-by-side with the proposed online program? How will its operations be affected or modified to ensure the feasibility and complementarity of both?
3. What are the differences, if any, between requirements and curriculum and between admissions criteria and requirements for online and traditional versions of the program? Are the courses comparable in quality (instruction, learning outcomes, and assessments) to courses taught on campus?
4. How will admission policies take into account the ability of students to succeed in a distance education program?
5. How will students access services such as financial aid and career counseling?
6. How will student advisement be handled?
7. What delivery methods will be used? How is the technology used appropriate to the nature and objectives of the program? How will expectations concerning the use of such technology be clearly communicated to students? How will students be provided assistance in using the technology?
8. Will there be any additional technology requirements for students?
9. Do you plan to recruit and admit out-of-state students?
10. Does the program require a field-based experience, such as an internship?
11. How will courses be designed, produced and tested to meet standards of accessibility for students with disabilities?
12. Are any special facilities, laboratories, or equipment required for the program? If so, how will students access such equipment?
13. What specific learning resources (e.g., online books, journals, etc.) will be available to students?
14. How will you verify the identity of each student who participates in the program?
15. Will you be using proctoring for exams? If so, will there be additional charges for students? If so, how will you notify students of these charges?
16. How will the program provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty?
17. What are the department’s and faculty’s experiences in developing online courses?
18. How will faculty with online course development or teaching responsibilities acquire the necessary skills?
19. Provide information on the program coordinator’s credentials (in both content and online delivery) to coordinate this program.

20. How will minimum direct instructional time be ensured and how will this be documented? (See credit hour policy)

**Mercer Credit Hour Policy**

*Mercer’s Credit Hour Policy* applies to all delivery formats, whether in a traditional classroom, in a hybrid setting, or 100% online. The University adheres to the Carnegie unit for contact time: 750 minutes of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of 1500 minutes of out-of-class student work for each credit awarded (2250 minutes of direct instruction and 4500 minutes of out-of-class work for a 3 credit hour course). Faculty who teach distance education courses are expected to adhere to the policy and are required to delineate in their syllabi the direct instructional activities, as well as any required synchronous activities required outside class session times indicated in the schedule. In addition, each college or school may have expectations for how direct instructional time should be allocated or documented. A template for the allocation of direct instructional time, utilized by Penfield College, is available in Appendix B.

**Student Privacy**

The privacy of distance learners at Mercer University is protected by the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, which affords students certain rights with respect to their educational records, including the rights to review and amend their records, the right to consent to disclosures, the right to restrict the release of directory information, and the right to file a complaint with the US Department of Education regarding the University’s compliance with FERPA.

In order to protect the privacy of students, faculty should ensure that the modes through which they communicate personally identifiable information or PII (e.g. social security number, student ID, address, birthdate) and confidential information (e.g. grades) are secure. Email is a public form of communication. It is not encrypted or secure. If a faculty member chooses to communicate by email information that is personally identifiable or confidential in nature, it is recommended that the email contain a link to a secure website. This applies to emails sent through a Learning Management System, like Blackboard, as well. Information like grades can be posted to Blackboard or another secure website. When in doubt about the method of communication to use, think about the nature of the information. If it is personally identifiable or confidential, choose a secure route.

**Authentication of Student Identity**

As a part of the accreditation standards, Mercer must demonstrate that it has a process in place to verify student identity. There are safeguards the University has in place for authentication of identity. Each student enrolled in a distance education course is assigned a secure login and password and must use this to register for and access the distance education course. Specific course and student information is not available to any outside users. For security purposes, Mercer University has
implemented a complex password requirement, and University expects that all Authorized Users are responsible for any use of their assigned individual account(s). Authorized Users may not run or otherwise configure software or hardware to intentionally allow access of an account by unauthorized individuals, and any attempt to use or hack another person’s computer account is a violation of University policy and may also be a violation of federal, state, or local laws. Violations of this policy may result in immediate termination of access to Mercer’s computer network resources, referral to the appropriate University authority for review and adjudication, and criminal or civil prosecution.

Programs with synchronous instruction involving web conferencing routinely authenticate the identity of students simply through participation. For asynchronous instruction, verification is more difficult. The most popular method used by other institutions to authenticate student identity is the use of human proctors for examinations (see below). Integrating some synchronous activities like web conferencing is another. Regardless of the method used, providing opportunities to verify identity within a course will help the University demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards.

Proctored Exams

Some distance education courses require proctored examinations. These are administered by college/school approved proctors or proctoring services at no expense to the student. When and if a program requires a student to pay for proctoring services, the institution is required to inform the student of those costs when enrolling in a course.

Academic Grievances

Should a faculty member learn of a student who wishes to file an academic grievance, the faculty member should refer the student to the University’s Grievance Policy and Procedure as outlined in the Student Handbook. If the grievance is non-academic in nature, students are also referred to the Grievance policy, and faculty should be aware that some distance education students have a separate complaint process available to them (see Complaint Process for Out-of-State Distance Learners above).

Other Policies

SACSCOC Guidelines in the Application of the Principles of Accreditation to Distance and Correspondence Education asks that institutions make explicit their policies concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, or other media products. At Mercer these policies apply to all faculty, whether they teach in a digital or traditional classroom environment, and are available in the current University Faculty Handbook and on the Policy website.

The University has a specific policy for Intellectual Property Rights and Distance Education. The General Principles of the policy support the development, production, and dissemination of intellectual property by Mercer faculty, staff and students, affirm the personal ownership of works of intellect by individual creators (with or without collaborators) done privately or as a member(s) of the Mercer community, and allow the University to commission specific work on its own behalf. The policy also outlines intellectual
property rights in courses approved for Mercer credit and other distance education projects, exceptions to the policy, moral rights of creators, and the use of the University name and identity. The full policy is available in Appendix C.
Guidelines and Resources for Distance Education Courses and Programs

In this section you will find information on the best practices utilized for teaching distance education courses, a checklist developed by the Distance Learning Committee, current and best practices for student orientation, and academic and student support resources.

Best Practices

There are many best practices resources for teaching distance education courses (see list below), and faculty are encouraged to include, expand upon, and share their own best practices within their college/school and the University. The following table is excerpted from The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips by Judith V. Boettcher and Rita-Marie Conrad, 2010. Other resources for best practices are available in the Bibliography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ten Best Practices for Teaching Online</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 1:</strong> Be present at the course site</td>
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<td><strong>Best Practice 2:</strong> Create a supportive online course community</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 3:</strong> Develop explicit expectations for learners and yourself related to how you will communicate and how much time students should be working on the course each week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 4:</strong> Use a variety of large group, small group, and individual work experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 5:</strong> Use synchronous and asynchronous activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 6:</strong> Ask for formal feedback early in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 7:</strong> Prepare discussions that invite responses, questions, discussion, and reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 8:</strong> Search out and use content resources that are available in digital format - if possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 9:</strong> Combine core concept learning with customized and personalized learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice 10:</strong> Plan a good closing and wrap-up activity for the course.</td>
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</table>

Checklist for Distance Learning Courses

The Distance Learning Committee of the University developed the following Checklist as a means for faculty to incorporate best practices into their online or hybrid courses. Additional support for instructional design may be available through your school or college (see below).

Welcome Announcement

✔ Include a welcome announcement with basic course navigation information.
✔ Include faculty introduction including photo or video/podcast.
✔ Include the University Academic Integrity Policy.
Course Information, Student Learning Outcomes, Response Time

✓ Include course syllabus, learning outcomes, student expectations (class policies and procedures), textbook information, outline of course content, due dates of assignments, course grading or student assessment policies and procedures (grading policy). Ensure that Mercer’s requirements for direct instruction in online courses are met.
✓ Include instructor contact information and accepted method of contact (Learning Management System or email).
✓ Include expected response time for email replies, feedback on assignments and grades on assignments.
✓ Clearly communicate student expectations, due dates, grading rubrics at the beginning of the course.
✓ Use assignment links or other features of the learning management system to make it easy for students to submit assignments.
✓ Include student privacy and student identity verification policies of the university.
✓ Include the amount of time students should be involved in course activities each week (see Mercer direct instruction requirements).
✓ Establish norms/expectations for online participation in synchronous and asynchronous settings (forum posts, online chat participation, microphone/camera use, ‘away from computer’ button, etc.).
✓ Clearly define Technology requirements (applications needed, hardware minimum requirements, etc.).
✓ Clearly define assignment submission requirements (late submission policy, file naming convention, file format requirements, etc.).
✓ Provide contact information and hours of availability for IT Help Desk or any other designated online learning support personnel.

Course Navigation

✓ Ensure that course menu items are clearly identified and all content areas are populated with content.
✓ Ensure that course navigation (menu) is uncluttered with only those tools to be used by students in the class are visible. All other tools are hidden.
✓ Ensure that academic and student support service links, such as the Academic Resource Center, the Library, Student Affairs, are included. These links and the Student Distance Learning Website should be available to students under a broader heading of “student resources.”
✓ Ensure that course headings and resource titles are consistently applied across courses within the program/university.

Course Structure

✓ Ensure that all course modules are complete, clearly identified, and available for release at the beginning of the course or as the instructor chooses to release them.
Type and Variety of Course Materials and Assessments

✓ Ensure that course content supports the student learning outcomes desired. Content is provided in a variety of formats to address differences in learning styles and to increase student engagement in learning.
✓ Ensure that instructions are provided on how to access or view materials (required downloads of viewers, players, etc.)
✓ Ensure course includes various assessment techniques to address differences in learning styles.
✓ Ensure course provides self-assessment methods such as quizzes, reflection activities, group work, or other strategies to guide learners and provide feedback.

Assignments

✓ Ensure assignments support student learning outcomes.
✓ Ensure feedback is provided to students according to the statement provided related to response times.

Copyright Citation

✓ Ensure that copyrighted materials that have been electronically formatted (scanned documents, compressed video files, etc.) include the proper citation and statement indicating permission was granted for use. See Mercer University copyright policy.

Accessibility

✓ Ensure that content can be provided in alternative formats or methods to accommodate students with disabilities. Contact the appropriate Office of Accessibility and Accommodation Services for guidance (Carol Burrowbridge, Macon Campus, (478) 301-2127; Rich Stilley, Atlanta Campus, (678) 547-6823). Information can also be found online here.

Communication and Student Collaboration

✓ Provide an open forum through which students can post questions to be answered by the instructor or other students.
✓ Use discussion forums or other online discussion consistently throughout the course to promote critical thinking.
✓ Provide tools and methods to promote student collaboration and interaction in support of learning outcomes.

Media Value

✓ Ensure that media used support the student learning outcomes, require little download time, and a standard web browser or the course management system. Clear instructions and download links are provided.
Links are provided to the Mercer Student Distance Learning Website that includes details on technology and network access capability required for online course success. Indicate if alternatives to synchronous technologies are to be accepted.

Active Student Engagement

The course uses a variety of methods and strategies to actively engage students and establish a sense of community among learners, such as blogs, wikis, group activities, social media activities. Student to student and student to instructor interaction is encouraged through a variety of methods and opportunities.

Student Feedback

Provide course evaluation opportunities other than the standard end-of-course evaluation to allow students to provide feedback on their learning experience during the course.

Student Orientation

As a part of best practice, each college or school at Mercer should provide orientation for distance learning students. Many of the current programs offer an on-campus orientation – this is especially true for hybrid programs that already require some on-campus activities – but as fully online programs grow, the need for a completely virtual orientation will too. A virtual orientation should familiarize a student with the University and its policies and procedures, provide information about the degree program with an overview of courses, and orient students to the online learning environment with strategies for success and access to academic and student support resources. Successful virtual orientations incorporate webinars, videos, and online tools to provide students with a comprehensive view of the institution. An example of best practice is the Penn State World Campus New Student Orientation.

Currently, Penfield College of Mercer University is the only college to provide a fully virtual orientation for distance learning students. Orientation is administered through Blackboard, and students are automatically enrolled in the orientation when they register for an online course. Students are also provided with this Mercer Online Course Guide. Orientation through other colleges and school varies, from intensive on-campus experiences to the simplified distribution of orientation packets and optional web conferences. Faculty are encouraged to contribute to the development of virtual orientation materials to meet the needs of distance students who enroll in hybrid or online programs.

Academic and Student Support Services

Distance education students have access to many of the same resources that on-campus students enjoy and are subject to all of the policies and procedures set forth in the University Student Handbook. Various academic and administrative units in the University have worked to establish policies and resources that directly affect and benefit distance learners. These include admissions and financial assistance, academic advising, registration and transcript services, course placement services, library services, bookstore services, academic support services, career planning services, personal counseling
services, and disability services. The [Distance Learning Website](#) provides detailed information on the nature and scope of the services available to distance education students.

It is recommended that faculty members inform their students of these services and methods of accessing them at the beginning of each course on the course syllabus or in another location within the course shell. The disability/accommodation statement must be included on each course syllabus (available online for Macon, Eastman, Savannah and select RAC graduate programs [here](#) and for Atlanta, Douglas, Newnan, and Henry County [here](#)).
Technology for Distance Education

Mercer utilizes technologies that enhance and support learning across all delivery formats, whether in the classroom or online. There exists a concerted and on-going effort to ensure that the University provides not only the most effective and appropriate technological tools but also the training and support for all Mercer students and faculty.

Technology and Instructional Design Resources and Support

At the university level, Academic Technology Services, a division of the university’s Information Technology department, provides technology support for all distance learning faculty members. Training tutorials, workshops, and individual instruction on instructional technologies such as Blackboard are available for faculty online. Regularly scheduled faculty workshops focused on effective teaching and enhanced learning in online and hybrid courses are offered at multiple locations, and the staff of Academic Technology Services responds to requests by individual colleges/schools, departments, and faculty members for assistance with particular components of online teaching and learning. Some individual colleges employ instructional designers or instructional design consultants to provide expertise in online course design and faculty development.

The University’s Department of Information Technology offers a Help Desk for faculty and students which is staffed 8:30-5:00 on weekdays. On weekends and after hours, distance education faculty are able to access Help Desk personnel through a beeper system. Faculty may access the IT Help Desk by calling 478 301-7000 or 678 547-8989 or through email at helpdesk@mercer.edu. In addition, the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Penfield College of Mercer University, and the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing employ full-time or contract staff members who are available to assist with distance education technology issues.

Technology Requirements and Learning Management Systems

Technology recommendations are available to distance education students on Mercer’s Student Information Technology website. If your course has additional technology requirements (e.g. webcam, headset, software), it is imperative that this information is communicated to students before they register for a class. As a participant in the SREB Electronic Campus, Mercer is required to inform students of technology requirements prior to enrollment. All technology requirements should be delineated in course syllabi as well.

The primary Learning Management System utilized and supported by the University is Blackboard. Every course at Mercer has Blackboard shell created for it, and faculty are encouraged to use that system. Some individual colleges also use Moodle (e.g. the College of Nursing), and still others deliver their distance courses without a learning management system. The Masters in Technical Communication Management in the School of Engineering, for example, delivers content via WebEx. Most programs, whether using a learning management system or not, incorporate external online tools to engage with students and disseminate information (e.g. Skype, Google Hangouts).
The University now also supports Blackboard Collaborate, which provides a wide range of online tools to create and facilitate interactive learning in all courses. Collaborate provides web conferencing, mobile collaboration, instant messaging, and more. It can be used in conjunction with Blackboard or Moodle or outside of a learning management system. Regardless of the tools or platform used, faculty should always be aware of the policies and processes that apply to distance education when utilizing technology in their online and hybrid courses.
Bibliography of Best Practices

10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education
The Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C)

EDUCAUSE

Quality Matters

United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA)

Journal of Online Learning and Teaching

International Journal on e-Learning

Journal of Learning Design

International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning
Appendix A

SACSCOC Guidelines in the Application of the *Principles of Accreditation* To Distance and Correspondence Education

With the underlying concept that the *Principles of Accreditation* apply to all programs of the institution, regardless of mode of delivery, institutions should consider the following guideline statements in implementing and reporting on distance and correspondence education programs.

**Mission**

If an institution offers significant distance and correspondence education, it should be reflected in the institution’s mission.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

The faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight of distance and correspondence education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.

The technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs and courses and expectations concerning the use of such technology are clearly communicated to students.

Distance and correspondence education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products.

Academic support services are appropriate and specifically related to distance and correspondence education.

Program length is appropriate for each of the institution’s educational programs, including those offered through distance education and correspondence education.

For all degree programs offered through distance or correspondence education, the programs embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with the institution’s mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.

For all courses offered through distance or correspondence education, the institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded and justifies the use of a unit other than semester credit hours by explaining it equivalency.

An institution entering into consortial arrangements or contractual agreements for the delivery of courses/programs or services offered by distance or correspondence education is an active participant in ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the courses/programs offered by all of the participants.
Faculty

An institution offering distance or correspondence learning courses/programs ensures that there is a sufficient number of faculty qualified to develop, design, and teach the courses/programs.

The institution has clear criteria for the evaluation of faculty teaching distance education courses and programs.

Faculty who teach in distance and correspondence education programs and courses receive appropriate training.

Institutional Effectiveness

Comparability of distance and correspondence education programs to campus-based programs and courses is ensured by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction.

The institution regularly assesses the effectiveness of its provision of library/learning resources and student support services for distance or correspondence education students.

Library and Learning Resources

Students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources.

Access is provided to laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs

Student Services

Students have adequate access to the range of services appropriate to support the programs offered through distance and correspondence education.

Students in distance or correspondence programs have an adequate procedure for resolving their complaints, and the institution follows its policies and procedures.

Advertising, recruiting, and admissions information adequately and accurately represent the programs, requirements, and services available to students.

Documented procedures assure that security of personal information is protected in the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results.

Students enrolled in distance education courses are able to use the technology employed, have the equipment necessary to succeed, and are provided assistance in using the technology employed.

Facilities and Finances

Appropriate equipment and technical expertise required for distance and correspondence education are available.
The institution, in making distance and correspondence education courses/programs a part of its mission, provides adequate funding for faculty, staff, services, and technological infrastructure to support the methodology.
Appendix B

Penfield College Direct Instruction Template for Distance Education Courses

*Direct Instruction Time: 2250 minutes per 3 hour course (750 minutes per credit hour)*

*Specific direct instructional activities in minutes to total 2250 minutes*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online lectures/instruction (synchronous or asynchronous)</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual synchronous class meetings</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Wiki projects</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video presentations</td>
<td>_______</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal/Blog writing</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat rooms</td>
<td>_______</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion boards</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trips (including virtual)</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online tests/quizzes</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video conferencing</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual labs</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online content modules</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service learning</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group or team-based activities</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2250 minutes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

MERCER UNIVERSITY POLICY ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

I. General Principles

A. Mercer University’s academic mission is to preserve, augment, and transmit knowledge and to foster the ability of its students to learn. This mission is best served by creating an intellectual environment that encourages and rewards creativity and innovation, while retaining for the University reasonable access to, and use of, the intellectual property that has been created with institutional support. Mercer supports the development, production, and dissemination of intellectual property by its faculty, staff, and students. This policy addresses issues of ownership and use of such intellectual property, with specific reference to the digital or Internet environment.

B. Mercer reaffirms its commitment to the personal ownership of intellectual property rights in works of the intellect by their individual creators, whether the creators work alone or with others, and whether they work privately or as members of the Mercer community.

C. Notwithstanding this commitment, Mercer also may commission specific works on its own behalf. For example, Mercer may support the creation of works by extraordinary allowances or grants, or it may acquire such works from, or develop them in company with, individual authors on mutually agreeable terms. Each such case shall require a written agreement, and Mercer shall own the intellectual property rights arising from the creation of these works-for-hire. Mercer may thereafter grant licenses or royalties or both to individual creators or contributors on just and reasonable terms.

II. Courses of Instruction Approved for Mercer Credit

A. Intellectual property rights arising in courses approved for Mercer University credit ordinarily belong to their individual creators in accordance with the general principle expressed in Article I, Section B of this Policy. Rights may also vest in Mercer to the extent that a course (or some portion of it) is acquired or commissioned by Mercer under Article I, Section C.

B. With respect to each such course (and whether the rights in that course belong to an individual creator or to Mercer), every member of the University community (including students, faculty and staff) shall enjoy a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to make all traditional, customary or reasonable academic uses of the content of that course while at Mercer (the “License”). The uses of the intellectual property are subject to the Conflict of Interest and Commitment Policy of each operational or academic unit.

C. The License shall exist automatically when a course is approved for credit by the University, and no additional formality shall be required. No royalty shall be payable for the License; sufficient consideration for such License shall be the mutual benefit realized by Mercer and the creator, as well as by the individual members of the University community.
D. The License also shall include Mercer’s right to offer the course, or to develop and offer derivative courses of instruction including courses intended for use in distance education projects, whether at Mercer or elsewhere. The License shall continue to be available to Mercer even if the faculty member in whom individual rights otherwise vest should leave Mercer.

III. Distance Education Projects

A. Mercer may appropriately consider any distance education project that offers the promise of securing and advancing Mercer’s mission and reputation. To that end, Mercer may participate in the development of such projects with members of its own community, or it may enter into relationships with persons outside the established academic community. In either case, the University may enter into such projects on terms and conditions that are fair and equitable so long as they do not adversely affect the fundamental principles of governance, tenure, and academic freedom otherwise recognized at Mercer.

B. Mercer faculty members, who are employed on a permanent full time or equivalent basis, and who intend to enter into any non-Mercer distance education project in which they propose to teach a course regularly or recurrently, shall first disclose the proposed undertaking in accordance with the terms of the applicable School or College Policy on Conflicts of Interest or Commitment.

Mercer University will presume a conflict of interest or commitment arises under this Policy on Intellectual Property Rights when faculty or staff members propose to undertake any of the following activities:

(1) teach a non-Mercer distance education course substantially equivalent to a conventional course they have been assigned to teach at Mercer; or

(2) teach a non-Mercer distance education course that is competitive with an existing or proposed Mercer distance education course which they have been offered an opportunity to teach; or

(3) participate in teaching a non-Mercer distance education course in circumstances likely to confuse or mislead the public with respect to their primary obligations or allegiance as members of the Mercer faculty; or

(4) participate in teaching a non-Mercer distance education course in circumstances likely to impair the continuing performance of their primary responsibilities at Mercer.

C. The designated official responsible for examining the proposed undertaking in which a conflict of interest or commitment presumptively arises under Article III, Section B may determine that the conflict is minimal, or that it can be resolved and approved on terms reasonably calculated to serve the best interests of Mercer and the individual faculty or staff member alike. In either case, the designated official shall give notice to that effect in writing within ninety (90) days, both to the individual and to the Provost. In the absence of such a determination, the individual shall not proceed further with the undertaking as proposed while remaining a member of the Mercer faculty or staff.
D. A faculty member who has engaged appropriately in a non-Mercer distance education project shall nevertheless seek approval annually thereafter with respect to his or her continuing participation in that project. If changed circumstances thereafter create a conflict, and the conflict cannot reasonably be cleared, the faculty member will withdraw from the project.

E. The University Advisory Board on Distance Education, appointed annually by the Provost, may develop additional interpretations or regulations reasonably designed to implement these provisions, and may recommend additional requirements with respect to prior disclosure and approval. The purpose of all such additional interpretations, regulations or requirements, however, will be to avoid potential conflicts of interest rather than to limit an individual’s ability to engage in acceptable outside professional activities, including distance education projects. To that end, Mercer will exert reasonable efforts to resolve such conflicts of interest and to eliminate any appearance of conflicts of interest through appropriate disclaimers, licenses, or the like.

IV. Exceptions

The Provost, in consultation with the University Advisory Board on Distance Education, may declare exceptions to these principles.

V. Moral Rights

The moral rights of individual creators will be respected in every case contemplated by this Policy. In no case will the University fail to recognize an individual creator’s entitlement to acknowledgment, attribution or other appropriate credit, to the fullest extent applicable.

VI. University Name and Identity

A. Intellectual property rights arising in Mercer University’s name, logos and other identifying marks belong to Mercer. Such rights may be licensed from time to time upon suitable terms and conditions approved by the President or his designee, taking into full and appropriate account the research, teaching and collegial missions of the University.

B. Members of the Mercer Community may identify themselves as such from time to time, with such indicia of their status as is usual and customary in the academy. Any use of Mercer’s name, logos or identifying marks, however, shall be reasonably calculated to avoid any confusing, misleading or false impression of particular sponsorship or endorsement by Mercer, and when necessary shall include specific disclaimers to that end.