WCSU Online Policy
Faculty Senate Distance Education Committee

Please see http://library.wcsu.edu/wcsu/DistanceEd/wiki for a list of committee members and working documents.
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I. Institutional Policy Issues

A. Purpose:
The purpose of Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) Online Learning Policy is to assure high quality in online/distance learning with regard to instruction, procedures, and support. Unless otherwise stated all academic policies and procedures apply to both on-campus and online courses. Nevertheless, the particular nature and circumstances of online learning necessitate a clear explication of policies and procedures on key areas. All Online Learning policies are generated and executed in accordance with the mission of WCSU.

B. Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs:
Distance learning activities at WCSU comply with the NEASC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education & On-line Learning and with the Guidelines of other accrediting bodies.


WCSU’s goal is to ensure that online courses meet the same quality standards as courses taught on campus. Additionally, some online learning may address the needs or topic in ways that on-campus classes cannot.

C. Definition:
Online Course: Defined as one in which course content is delivered online via the University’s web-based course management system, whether synchronously or asynchronously. Students submit course work and participate in discussions with faculty and other students via the Internet. Many online courses contain media-rich presentations that reinforce important concepts. Students in these courses communicate with faculty and fellow students using e-mail, discussion boards, and submit assignments to faculty through the University’ web-based course management system.

Hybrid Course: Defined as one in which regularly scheduled classroom time is comprised of both face to face meetings and online learning. All face to face meetings for a hybrid course will be announced prior to registration. The online component is delivered via the University’s web-based course management system. The following schedule applies to hybrid courses:
- 100/200 level classes, hybrid is 70% face-to-face and 30% online
- 300/400 level classes hybrid is 50% face-to-face and 50% online
- 500 level classes and above hybrid is 30% face-to-face and 70% online
D. Review of Distance Learning Policy:
The responsibility for evaluating and revising the Online Learning Policy resides with the Senate Distance Learning Committee, as specified by NEASC.

II. Curriculum and Instruction

A. Academic Integrity of Online Learning Courses:
Online learning courses are comparable to campus-based courses in terms of:

- Syllabi
- Office Hours
- Expected learning outcomes
- Readings and assignments
- Grading
- Methods of evaluation
- Student Opinion Survey

Online learning courses are subject to the same policies as stated in the Graduate and Undergraduate Catalogs for campus-based courses. Faculty members must also follow the regulations described in the Collective Bargaining Agreement and the guidelines in the Faculty Handbook.

B. Oversight of Courses:
Like all academic activities, online learning at WCSU operates under the purview of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, CUCAS and Grad Council. WCSU adheres to the policy that all courses of the same prefix and number are equivalent, regardless of mode of delivery and/or period of delivery. It is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that the rigor of programs and quality of instruction are maintained within their courses.

C. Online learning Course Offering Process
For new online offerings, the faculty member must complete the Online Education at WCSU course offering form. Form approval must be provided by the Department Chair, Academic Dean, and Provost. This process should be done as expediently as possible.

See: http://www.wcsu.edu/academics/online.asp

D. Instructional Review: Quality of Instruction Issues
Instruction in all courses, whether campus-based or online is reviewed by the same criteria set forth in the AAUP-CBA, the Faculty Handbook and Departmental Bylaws.

Criteria will include, but will not be limited to evaluation of teaching effectiveness and student satisfaction. Evaluators may need special training and support to adequately review online instruction due to the distinct pedagogical implications.
that must be considered when looking at online teaching and learning strategies and processes.


E. Faculty Interaction with Students:
As in all classes, best practices in online learning necessitate clear guidelines on faculty student interaction. Online and hybrid courses require strong instructor presence and frequent interactions with students. Faculty should clarify in their syllabi and course policies the nature of planned interaction, feedback timelines (like grading or email turnaround), as well as appropriate modes of communication (email, phone, fax, chat, or discussion board.) Faculty should ensure clear responses to students, within a student-friendly timeframe. Complete and detailed feedback should be provided via the discussion board, individual email or other appropriate means. Office hours shall be held in compliance with the Faculty Handbook. Depending on the nature of the course, some may want to provide synchronous office hours when students know faculty can be reached by methods such as VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol), telephone or email. The instructor is expected to comply with all privacy laws in conducting online and hybrid courses.

F. Faculty Responsibility:
The instructor is responsible for presenting course content, instruction, and evaluating student progress in online learning courses, as well as for campus-based courses. Rapid changes in technology may require faculty to reevaluate online course resources frequently.

G. Accessibility (ADA):
All online learning is conducted in regard to and compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

see: http://www.wcsu.edu/accessability/ADAandRA.asp

H. Intellectual Property and Third Party Providers:
Distance learning courses are frequently designed and disseminated by other colleges, universities, corporations or non-profit organizations. In the event that WCSU wishes to purchase or lease modules or entire courses from a Third Party, such courses or modules must be evaluated by the appropriate curricular committees to ensure that the materials meet all quality criteria set forth by the appropriate curricular committees before any legal agreements are signed between parties.
I. University Honesty Policy:
Online, hybrid and on-site course instruction follow the same campus-wide policy on Academic Honesty. WCSU affirms its commitment to enforcing the Academic Honesty Policy and to supporting faculty and students in the handling of academic integrity matters. WCSU is committed to making information on academic integrity easy to find on the campus Web sites and within online courses. Departments offering online courses and degrees should include ethics instruction within the relevant course and/or core curricula. WCSU encourages faculty to report every suspected violation of the Academic Honesty Policy and act upon it.

See: http://www.wcsu.edu/facultystaff/handbook/pages/AH-pol.asp

J. Copyright Compliance:
The University acts in accordance with Section 403 of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.


K. Testing Policies: Verifying the identity of the student submitting work online
WCSU verifies the identity of students in online classes in accordance with current educational standards. WCSU provides secure student logins and password to access online courses and related resources, discussions, assignments and assessments. Students are provided instruction on maintaining the security of their logins and passwords. WCSU must have processes that establish that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives academic credit. Verification methods are determined by the institution and may include but are not limited to secure login and password protocols, proctored examinations, and new or other technologies and practices.

III. Faculty

A. Faculty Qualifications:
Faculty members who teach online learning courses must meet the same qualifications as faculty who teach campus-based courses at Western Connecticut State University. They will be selected in accordance with the WCSU Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement.

B. Faculty Training:
WCSU provides a variety of training workshops and individual training for faculty in the use of all relevant courseware and/or software. Training will be provided as needed to ensure that faculty remain current in the use of the technology. WCSU’s Center for Excellence Learning and Teaching (CELT) should offer professional
development opportunities for faculty to learn best practices for effective online communication with students.

In addition to training and professional development for faculty related to teaching in distance learning formats, the faculty meets periodically to share information and discuss ideas to enhance effectiveness of courses and quality of courses being taught.

**C. Faculty Evaluation:**
Procedures to be followed for the evaluation of faculty - administration of Student Opinion Surveys and Peer Observations—should follow the guidelines set forth in the CBA, the Faculty Handbook and Departmental Bylaws in as close to the same manner as is possible in online and on-campus courses. The individual DEC’s and Department Chairs should be permitted access to online classes in a manner that is comparable to the observation of faculty teaching on-campus classes. Additionally, department curriculum and assessment committees should be permitted access on a limited basis to courses to ensure course quality. Departments should identify assessment procedures for online learning that are consistent with their mission. Onsite and online courses should be comparable experiences and each department will need to periodically review its courses to assure that approved course learning outcomes are addressed.

**D. Faculty Teaching Load:**
Faculty members teaching distance-learning courses receive the same workload credit as faculty who teach campus-based courses.

**IV. Student Support Services**

**A. Student Services:**
All policies covering on-campus classes shall also apply to distance learning classes. This includes matriculation, financial aid, and registration.

The WCSU website shall provide information about distance learning orientation sessions as well as all other services online (e.g., financial aid, career development, tutoring services, counseling and academic advising). Students should consult an academic advisor before registering for an online learning class, as well as campus-based courses. Special attention should be paid to a student’s ability to work independently and to perform all or most course work by reading and writing. Students should plan their schedules wisely making sure they have sufficient time to complete an online class within the allotted time. Students must ensure that they will have adequate access to a computer and the internet to complete the class.

**B. Student Training**
It is recommended that all students must complete an orientation to online learning course before registering for their first course. This training will familiarize the
student with the instructional software and well as acquaint them with the principles and practices of being a good online student. New student orientation sessions should include training on the university’s current web-based learning management system, as provided by Information Technology & Innovation.

**C. Student Complaints/Grievance Procedure:**

All student concerns about grading and other academic concerns should follow established University procedures as set forth in the Student Handbook, the Undergraduate or Graduate Catalog and the Faculty Handbook.

**D. Library Resources:**

WCSU Libraries ensure that the distance learning community has access to library materials equivalent to those provided in traditional settings. The Libraries provide convenient, direct access to library materials in appropriate formats that are of sufficient quality, depth, number, scope, and currency to:

- meet students’ needs in fulfilling course assignments;
- enrich the academic programs;
- meet teaching and research needs;
- support curricular needs;
- promote the acquisition of lifelong learning skills;
- accommodate students with varying levels of technological access (i.e., low bandwidth); and
- accommodate other informational needs of the distance learning community as appropriate.

Library services offered to the distance learning community are designed to meet a wide range of informational, instructional, and user needs. Services include virtual reference and research assistance (via chat, e-mail, phone, text); online library instruction and informational services (including information literacy instruction); reliable, rapid, secure access to online resources; access to electronic reserve materials, interlibrary loan and document delivery services; and adequate service hours. Library services to the distance learning community will be promoted through variety of channels, including the Library’s mobile-enhanced website, and will include documented and updated policies and procedures

**E. University Bookstore:**

The WCSU website provides a link to the WCSU Bookstore (which provides information for both distance learning students and traditional students. All students may make bookstore purchases using the online service. The bookstore will mail the requested materials to the student.
V. Distance Learning Facilities and Support Services

A. Distance Learning Equipment and Facilities:
Western Connecticut State University provides the necessary equipment and facilities to effectively deliver scheduled synchronous and asynchronous courses at a distance. Video conferencing rooms are available to fully deliver courses. Computers with Internet access are available on campus for students who may need to use campus facilities for distance learning purposes. All courses that require laboratories and clinical site visits, which cannot be completed via technology-based distance learning, are handled with special arrangements made by the faculty member in consultation with the Dean and IT.

B. Funding for Distance Learning:
Sufficient funds for the operation of online/distance learning programs have been allocated to maintain instructional offerings. The annual University budget provides for the maintenance of equipment and networks the WCSU CIO is responsible for this budget.

C. Institutional Technology Responsibility:
Information Technology & Innovation provides the technical expertise necessary for maintaining equipment and networks, so that the delivery of online/distance learning programs may occur. A System Administrator addresses student and faculty concerns with the delivery of distance learning and an online Helpdesk is available for equipment problems. In addition, UC provides training of faculty and staff. UC schedules several training modules for professional development during each year and or as needed. UC provides orientation and training modules available online for students.

VI. Planning and Evaluation:

A. Institutional Planning:
The viability of distance learning programs is included in the planning process. Distance learning is planned to meet the University mission, strategic initiatives, goals and objectives, and is consistent with the University long-range planning document. Distance learning is designed and evaluated according to the same guidelines used for on-campus programs. The effectiveness of distance learning is assessed as discussed in this document. Finally, the results of the assessment are used to make appropriate changes to the long-range plan and to the program. Departments offering online courses or programs track the effectiveness of such program through their assessment process.

B. Educational Effectiveness
Distance learning is designed and evaluated according to the same guidelines used to assess on-campus courses, programs, and departments. The effectiveness of distance learning is assessed based on the accreditation policies described by
NEASC and other national and regional accrediting bodies related to specific program areas across the University.
Recommendations

Date: July 2, 2012

With respect to the proposed Distance Education Policy, we make the following recommendations.

- For online and hybrid instruction to be effective here at WCSU it is recommended that CELT become the faculty-driven catalyst for addressing technology and learning. **Purpose:** in order to perform this function CELT’s profile and resources need to be augmented and strengthened. Specifically, the Senate Distance Education Committee, in cooperation with Information Technology & Innovation, create a series of faculty workshops focusing on the development and maintenance of online courses. The committee should also create a best practices document to assist faculty in the creation and evaluation of their online offerings.

- That Information Technology & Innovation modify the university’s installation of its current course management software (CMS) to require all new users—faculty and students—to complete an online tutorial before being able to use said system. **Purpose:** to ensure that new users demonstrate minimum standards for using the CMS.

- That Information Technology & Innovation create and make available to each academic department an anonymous online version of the student opinion survey instrument with content identical to that ordinarily in use by the department or one that has been designed or approved by the department specifically for online use in accordance with Article 4.11.8 of the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement. The procedure for administering the survey shall also be subject to approval by the department as provided for in Article 4.11.8.

- That Information Technology & Innovation modify its course registration system such that hybrid courses receive two room assignments, one physical and one "ONLINE." **Purpose:** to provide a simple mechanism for identifying hybrid courses in online course listings.

- That the procedure for scheduling an online course be no more difficult than for onsite classes, requiring the same sequence of approvals and paperwork. Department Chairs must remain cognizant of any substantive changes to a program as the percentage of online courses expands, as per NEASC guidelines. **Purpose:** to foster and facilitate the creation of online courses as a regular component of a term's offerings.