



Policy on Distance Education

Area: Division of Academic Affairs
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1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) *Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement*
2. SACSCOC *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*
3. University System of Georgia Board of Regents Policy Manual, Section 3.3.3, *Instruction Offered Externally*
4. University System of Georgia *Academic and Students Affairs Handbook*, Section 2.3.7, *External Degrees: Off-Campus & Online Instructional Delivery*
5. University System of Georgia *Academic and Students Affairs Handbook*, Section 2.3.7.2, *Distance Learning Approval Procedures*

Responsible Party: Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

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I. Purpose

This document establishes a comprehensive distance education policy, which addresses the development of new distance education programs and courses and the comparability of existing distance and face-to-face courses and programs. This policy ensures consistency of courses and programs in content, rigor, and overall educational quality, regardless of delivery mode. It is intended to address both existing and future programs and courses and to ensure continued comparability over time.

In support of its mission to create “learning experiences of the highest quality,” Georgia Southern University is committed to ensuring that the growing number of distance learning courses and programs it offers meets the same high level of quality and rigor as face-to-face classes and programs. Georgia Southern online students experience learner-centered teaching and engaging online classroom environments, which use technology to enhance learning and student learning outcomes.

The development of new distance education programs adheres to the University System of Georgia’s two-step process for new program approvals—first requiring a New Program Prospectus, and then, if that is approved by the Board of Regents, a Formal Proposal for a New Degree Program and Distance Learning Delivery. Submission of these documents follow Georgia Southern University’s policy on Academic Program Development and Approval Process as well as SACSCOC policy on Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions of the Commission on Colleges. New distance education courses are approved using the same curriculum form as face-to-face courses.

II. Policy Statement

Distance education is defined by the University System of Georgia to include any credit-bearing course which is delivered 95% by distance learning methods, or program of which more than 50% is delivered through one or more forms of distance technology. Instructor and student may be separated by time and/or geographic location and employ two-way video conferencing, online asynchronous or synchronous methods, web-based materials and resources, electronic-based discussion, and video and/or audio streaming.

Georgia Southern University recognizes that for distance education to be effective, courses cannot simply be moved from the face-to-face classroom into the online classroom. Rather, face-to-face courses must be carefully and intentionally adapted so that they make the best use of online resources, pedagogy, and technical support. In light of this, faculty assume primary responsibility for and exercise oversight over distance education content, and the development and teaching of distance education courses will proceed with a focus on content, learning outcomes, and online teaching excellence.

Distance education courses and programs, including those offered exclusively online, have the same rigor and quality as face-to-face courses and programs, which is established by adhering to Georgia Southern and University System of Georgia course and program approval processes and the SACSCOC approval process. Annual departmental reports (See “Procedures” below) and annual program assessment reports ensure an ongoing process for maintaining comparability and examining quality. Available technological services enable faculty to effectively deliver and students to fully engage with course and program material. Georgia Southern University provides distance education students with the same range of academic and student support services that support the courses and programs offered. Details at: <http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/gsuonline/>.

Once courses and programs have been approved through Georgia Southern and University System of Georgia course approval processes, faculty members who will be engaged in distance education participate in a training process administered through the Centers for Teaching and Technology. This training prepares them to develop and teach online employing sound assessment and pedagogical practices, collaborative design, and appropriate technology using the university-mandated LMS (Learning Management System). For courses currently offered online that have not undergone the curriculum approval process, departments will submit the appropriate curriculum forms to obtain institutional curriculum approval.

III. Exclusions (if applicable)

Consortial agreements are governed by Georgia Southern’s Policy on MOU’s and SACSCOC Policy on Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Awards. Online programs/courses that are taught by Georgia Southern faculty and are part of consortial agreements with other institutions must be taught within the framework of the Georgia Southern Distance Education Policy and procedures. However, classes/programs being offered to Georgia Southern students by other institutions may not comply with this policy.

IV. Procedures (if applicable)

A. Current Distance Education Courses and Programs

For courses that have sections offered both online and face-to-face, the assurance of comparability is accomplished by reviewing courses for rigor and quality of instruction. This review verifies and provides evidence of comparability of syllabi, student learning outcomes, assignments and tests used to determine achievement of these outcomes, and results of student performance. Assignments, tests, and results of student performance are evaluated holistically. As part of Department Annual Reports, department chairs submit to deans the comparative information for both delivery modes. Resources are available from Centers for Teaching and Technology (CT2) to assist chairs with this comparison. If the review of course comparability reveals dissimilarities, faculty are directed to CT2 for assistance.

B. New Distance Education Courses and Programs

Henceforth, any new online courses undergo the same curriculum procedures for approval as face-to-face courses. Existing courses that wish to move online submit a course revision form through the appropriate curricular process.

Upon approval, new online courses are formally developed in collaboration with the Centers for Teaching and Technology. Faculty are certified to teach online after they have undergone the appropriate training through the Centers for Teaching and Technology. Details at: <http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/col/design/course-development/>.

C. Distance Education Faculty and Student Support Services

Departments offering library, technical, academic and student support services to faculty and students provide information regarding services delivered to distance education students. These services include, but are not limited to, orientation, library access, technical questions, ADA accommodations, academic advisement, financial aid counseling, registration and graduation services, and complaint resolution processes. This information is provided via either the Administrative, Academic and Student Support Services Annual Assessment Reports or Department Annual Reports submitted to the appropriate Vice President. The Administrative, Academic and Student Support Services Annual Assessment Reports are reviewed by the Institutional Effectiveness Review Team to ensure students have access to services necessary to support the successful completion of distance education courses and programs. Details at: <http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/gsuonline/>.

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