SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

University Policy for Distance Education

Version: 2.0   **Responsible University Official:** Provost

Effective Date: January 1, 2023

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide institution-level standards and definitions for distance education to ensure the academic quality for which SLU is known is maintained throughout our distance education programs and courses, and to address regulatory compliance.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all University distance education programs and courses as defined in the Definitions section of this policy.

3.0 Definitions

Definitions in this policy are informed by regulatory expectations from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and requirements from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Because the USDOE and HLC definitions for distance education differ from one another, we have used those definitions as a foundation on which to establish institutionally-appropriate definitions for *distance education*, *distance programs*, and *distance courses*, all of which allow us to comply with federal regulations and accreditor expectations. Please note: the definitions here were developed to guide quality assurance and compliance but may differ from those used for external reporting purposes; however, the definitions have been developed in collaboration with multiple University offices to ensure coding schemas across University systems allow for accurate reporting as required by external stakeholders.

Distance Education: education that uses technology (i) to deliver instruction/facilitate learning for students who are physically separated from the instructor and (ii) to support *regular and substantive interaction* (defined below) between the students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously.

Distance Programs (distance-delivered programs): certificate or degree programs designed so that 75% or more of all courses counting toward the certificate or degree may be taken as distance-delivered courses. Some programs may not be *exclusively* distance-delivered, as in the case of programs that allow students to complete the certificate or degree through either distance or in-person courses.

Distance Courses (distance-delivered courses): courses in which 75% or more of the instruction and interaction occurs via technology, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other. All distance courses must meet expectations for *regular and substantive interaction* as defined in this policy, regardless of format (asynchronous, synchronous, etc.)

Regular and substantive interaction: a term used by the USDOE and HLC to ensure distance education is appropriately interactive and facilitated by the instructor. According to the USDOE:

> "Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, **and** also includes at least two of the following:
> (i) Providing direct instruction;
> (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
> (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
> (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
> (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency."

While the USDOE requires only a minimum of two (2) of the activities listed above, SLU expects distance courses and programs to go beyond this minimum in their design whenever possible to ensure a high degree of interaction between students and instructors, consistent with our Jesuit values.

Additionally, the USDOE requires the University to:

> "ensure[] regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency:
>
> (i) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; **and**
> (ii) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student."

The University's course design standards for distance courses have specific criteria to ensure we meet the USDOE expectations for instructor-student interaction.

Asynchronous Online Course: A distance-delivered course in which **75% or more** of the instruction and interaction occurs online, with the instructor and students completing online activities *at different times* ("asynchronously"). Asynchronous online courses may include limited synchronous meetings.

Synchronous Online Course: A distance-delivered course in which **75% or more** of the instruction and interaction occurs online, with the instructor and students engaged in online or web conferencing *activities at the same time* ("synchronously"), on an established schedule that is published at the time of course registration.

Dual-Mode Course: A co-synchronous course in which students learn together, in real time, with some students located together in an in-person classroom and some students participating in the live class session via web conferencing technology physically separated from the instructor. Dual-mode courses involve two distinct (dual-listed) sections. Students are required to register either for the in-person section or the remote participation section. Students registered for the remote participation section are expected to participate fully in the in-person section class meetings, on the same day(s) and time(s) for the duration of the term, and to complete all the same activities as the students registered for the in-person section. To ensure educational equity for students and workload equity for instructors, the remote section of dual-mode courses **may not be asynchronous** (a version of what is sometimes called "HyFlex" courses). Students registered in the remote section must participate remotely in the live, in-person class sessions. SLU does not use the term "HyFlex" for any distance or blended courses.

For the purposes of this policy, the term "faculty member" includes all individuals performing instructional activities in a course; the terms "distance programs" and "distance-delivered programs" are used interchangeably; and the terms "distance courses" and "distance-delivered courses" are used interchangeably.

4.0 University Standards for Distance Education

To ensure quality, Saint Louis University commits to the following standards for all Distance Education programs and courses. The standards are based on the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions'(C-RAC) Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education and have been developed specifically with SLU's context and mission in mind. Note: This policy establishes minimum expectations for distance education at the University level; programs and accreditors may have additional expectations.

1. Distance education is appropriate to the University's mission and purposes.
    a. The University publicly states the value of distance education in support of its Mission.
    b. As appropriate, the University's distance education programs and courses align with stated institutional goals for the student experience.
    c. The recruitment and admissions practices supporting distance education programs and courses appropriately target the student populations to be served.

2. The University's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding distance education programs and courses are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.
    a. The University's strategic planning processes include planning for distance education.

b. Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase the number of distance education programs and courses as well as student enrollment in new and existing distance education programs.

c. Plans for expanding distance education demonstrate the University's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality.

d. The University and its distance education programs regularly evaluate and respond to resource needs and availability.

e. The University prepares a multi-year budget for distance education that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, student and academic services, and technology infrastructure.

3. Distance education is incorporated into the University's systems of governance and academic oversight.

a. The University faculty have a primary role in the design and implementation of its distance education offerings.

b. Approval of distance education programs and courses follows standard processes used in the school/college or university.

c. The University ensures the rigor of the distance education programs and courses offerings and the quality of the instruction.

d. The University conducts periodic distance education program evaluation for sustainability and alignment with institutional priorities.

e. Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the University can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all distance education programs and courses provided under its name.

4. Curricula for the University's distance education programs and courses are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.

a. Curricula delivered through distance education are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs if offered in both modalities.

b. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses.

c. Scheduling of courses for distance education programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees.

d. The University or program has established and enforces a policy on faculty-student ratios in distance education courses to support effective student learning.

e. Curriculum, course design and delivery support student-student and faculty-student interaction.

5. The University evaluates the effectiveness of its distance education programs and courses, including the extent to which the distance education goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.

a. Assessment of student learning reflects effective practices for distance education.

b. Student course evaluations are routinely administered, and response analysis contributes to course improvements.

c. The University regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in distance education courses and uses the results for improvement.

d. The University documents its success in implementing changes informed by assessment and evaluation at the University and program levels.

6. Faculty responsible for delivering the distance education curricula and evaluating students' success in achieving the goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.

a. The University provides regular professional development programming for faculty teaching in distance education including best practices in distance education pedagogy, applicable technology tools, and institutional mission.

b. The University has in place practices to ensure faculty teaching in distance education programs and courses are appropriately prepared to teach in the distance education environment.

c. Effective support is available for faculty members in distance education pedagogy and technology use throughout the duration of the course or program.

7. The University provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in distance education programs and courses.

a. The University's admissions process for distance education programs provides effective web-based information to students about the nature of the distance education environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in distance education.

b. Distance education orientation designed for the course or program is provided.

c. Support services are provided to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the distance education program or course.

d. Students in distance education programs have easy access to effective tech support 24/7.

e. Students using distance education have effective access to learning resources appropriate for the program or course, such as library and information resources.

f. Student complaint, code of conduct, and appeal processes are clearly defined, accessible, and designed such that distance students are able to engage in the processes effectively from a distance.

g. Publications and advertising for distance education programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements including any face-to-face expectations, academic calendar, and on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work).

h. Courses, services, and resources used in distance education employ strategies to comply with ADA accessibility regulations per the University Distance Education policies.

8. The University assures the academic integrity of its distance education offerings.

a. The University has in place effective procedures to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education program or course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the

academic credit. (Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)

b. The University and school/college policies on academic integrity are relevant and appropriate for distance education.

c. The institution makes clear in writing that the academic integrity processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of program admission and course registration of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. (Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)

d. Academic integrity policies and expectations are presented during the orientation for distance students.

e. Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the authentication process to University's systems.

5.0 Approvals

This policy was:

1. Updated and approved by Distance Education Committee: October 31, 2022

2. Approved by CADD: December 21, 2022

3. Approved by Provost: December 21, 2022