



Policies for Online Learning at Plymouth State University

Approved by Faculty October 6, 2010

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1. General Information and Purpose

Plymouth State University (PSU) recognizes the significance of organizing its distance learning initiatives in order to deliver well-coordinated programs. Coordination of distance learning initiatives is required to ensure a high level of quality, provide resources and assistance for faculty, provide support services for distance learning students, maximize the use of university resources with a minimum of duplication, and ensure consistent and fair policies and procedures. Organized and well-coordinated programs facilitate marketing and promotional strategies and strengthen the University's image as an innovative and technologically sound institution.

Rapid advancements in technology will continue to create new methods for providing and delivering distance learning. Plymouth State University is committed to ensuring that distance learning programs and courses will be as academically rigorous as their on-campus counterparts, and will result in meaningful and deep learning (active learning reinforced over an extended period of time). The university also recognizes that emerging methods for delivering educational content bring new and different teaching and learning challenges. Therefore, the policies and procedures that impact distance learning will continuously change, and these guidelines will continue to be reviewed and revised to reflect current best practices. Additionally, as changes occur that are internally developed or that are required by the University System of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Post Secondary Education Commission, or the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), this document will be revised to incorporate those changes.

The following distance learning policies and procedures are intended to assist with planning, coordination, and technological support for participating administrators, faculty and staff. These policies and procedures are built on Plymouth State University's Strategic Plan, the Plymouth State University Mission Statement, "Online Education Policies and Procedures for Undergraduate Education", and NEASC's "Statement of Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs" and shall apply to new distance learning activities as well as to existing courses and programs in which the method of delivery has changed

from that approved in the original curriculum proposal.

2. Definitions

Distance learning - for the purposes of this document, distance learning will be defined as instruction delivered through electronic means such as television, interactive video conferencing, or the internet.

Distance learning course - an individual course in which a proportion of instruction occurs when the student and the instructor are not in the same physical setting. The course is considered distance learning if the student receives a significant portion of their instruction at a distance.

Web-enhanced Course – an individual course in which face-to-face instruction is supplemented with materials delivered via distance learning, but maintains 100% seat time in face-to-face delivery.

Hybrid course/Blended Instruction – an individual course in which some face-to-face instruction is replaced with distance learning.

Online Course – an individual course in which the majority of instruction is delivered via distance learning.

Distance learning program - an approved collection of courses or course of study where a student can earn 50% or more credits necessary to qualify for a degree through distance learning.

3. Planning for Distance Learning

The appropriateness and viability of distance learning programs must be carefully considered in the planning process. Distance learning programs should be aligned with the institution's role and mission, consistent with the institution's long range plans, and supportive of its educational strategies. Distance learning programs should be designed and evaluated according to guidelines similar to those utilized for on-campus programs.

The design and development of distance learning courses and programs should follow priorities established by the University. These priorities should be based on educational requirements, market studies, public demand, community and business needs, and the competitive advantages of PSU. Development of distance learning programs should maximize university research and educational goals, promote the development of resources unavailable at other institutions, and encourage collaboration with other institutions.

4. Academic Requirements and Quality Standards

The following standards represent important guiding principles for developing, conducting and evaluating distance education instruction activities at PSU.

4.01. Plymouth State University engages in distance learning courses and programs which are consistent with the institutional role and mission.

4.02. Distance learning conducted at PSU will comply with the "Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Learning" as presented by The Institute for Higher Education Policy, and in accordance with the New England States Commission on Higher Education "Statement of Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs", in accordance with guidelines published by the New Hampshire Post Secondary Education Commission, and with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

4.03. The course or program that is being proposed as a degree-related distance learning activity shall meet at least the same quality standards applicable to on-campus instruction as well as quality standards specifically applicable to distance learning instruction.

4.04. Distance learning courses will be listed as such in the course schedule.

4.05. Each distance learning course provides for planned interaction and timely feedback between students and instructor(s) teaching the course.

4.06. The instructor will be responsible for the delivery of instruction and for evaluating student progress.

4.07. Faculty will be selected and evaluated by the same standards and procedures required to select faculty responsible for on-campus course delivery. In addition, to be permitted to deliver a distance learning course, an instructor must be certified by Learning Technologies and Online Education. This will include instruction in the use of PSU's Learning Management System (LMS) and pedagogy for teaching in an online environment. If instructors have received a certification from another institution, they may submit a copy of the certificate in order to have the required training waived. Additionally, all first-time online instructors will receive mentoring for the duration of their first distance learning course, by a course designer in Learning Technologies and Online Education or an instructor who has been approved by Learning Technologies and Online Education.

4.08. Learning Technologies and Online Education (LTOE) will provide ongoing training and support for faculty.

4.09. For degree-seeking students, the same policies concerning admissions requirements, scholastic standards, and other administrative processes apply to distance learning programs as they do for on-campus programs.

4.10 All distance learning courses will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis by the Department Chair or designee and Course Designer (LTOE designee), and evaluation results will be used for continuous program improvement. This should follow procedures similar to those in effect for face-to-face courses.

4.10a. If it is determined that a course should be reviewed due to the following criteria: 1. it is a new online course in its first semester; 2. complaints regarding quality or lack of instructor presence; 3. high attrition rate, then the Chairs or Deans or their designees will be granted access to the course provided they notify the instructor and request access from Learning Technologies and Online Education. (see section 9.05)

4.11 Program evaluation procedures will include a determination that distance learning programs result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the PSU's degree or certificate awarded.

4.12 Before PSU uses any course, program, or academic services from another institution,

they will be evaluated for their quality, academic rigor, and suitability for the award of college credit and a degree or certificate from PSU. Such reviews will be done by the appropriate faculty approval process.

4.13 All distance learning courses will provide for adequate verification of students' work. This may include the use of proctored exams given at a distance.

4.14 The Provost, in consultation with the dean, department chair, the instructor, and director of Learning Technologies and Online Education, will determine the appropriate enrollment that can be supported in the distance learning program and in individual courses based upon the content and learning activities, the nature of the learners, the technologies used, the support available to faculty, and the economic feasibility of the course.

5. Administrative Approval and Coordination of Distance Learning Courses and Programs

5.01. Distance learning instruction will be offered with the consensus of the Director of Learning Technologies and Online Education, the curriculum committee, the responsible academic department chair and academic deans.

5.02. The institution shall provide the means for assessing the quality of the distance learning offerings in comparison with traditional instructional approaches. (Appendix A)

5.03. Distance learning instruction shall be offered through the academic department that also administers the corresponding on-campus program; undergraduate online courses will be administered by the Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies; graduate-level online courses will be administered by the College of Graduate Studies.

5.04.a. Before any currently approved face-to-face (f2f) course can migrate to online delivery, these procedures must be completed:

- Redesign course for online delivery by faculty member in consultation with LTOE.
- Course syllabus reviewed by LTOE for best practices in online learning, and to ensure course objectives and assessments can be met in the new format.
- Information must be provided to students, at the time of course registration, as to the percentage of the course that will be taught at a distance, and the technology requirements for participation and assessment.

5.04.b. All new online courses must, in addition to established curricular approval, be reviewed by LTOE for format approval.

5.05. If a distance learning program is new to the university, proposals are prepared according to current practices for all program proposals. Learning Technologies and Online Education will review program proposals to ensure current resources can support the delivery of said program.

5.06. Expectations regarding compensation will be defined so that a faculty member teaching a distance learning course understands at the outset whether teaching this course will be compensated in load or over load.

5.07. Faculty members are expected as a normal condition of employment at Plymouth State University to develop and keep current the courses they are assigned to teach. PSU retains full rights to common elements of course syllabi including learning objectives, course

descriptions, course requirements and course schedules that are submitted, reviewed and approved as specified by the appropriate academic department and/or curriculum committee. Rights to all other course materials belong to the instructors who create them. The exception to this principle is course materials for which a faculty member receives compensation from PSU beyond the academic year salary, such as course reduction, grant award, paid leave (sabbatical or other), or stipend (see Appendix C). In such cases, a written agreement, initiated by the School or College that specifically spells out the ownership rights of the School or College and the instructor will be made prior to course or course materials development. In the absence of a written agreement, the default is the second and third sentences of this paragraph.

5.08. Removal of distance learning programs is accomplished via the same procedures as on-campus programs.

6. Student Support

6.01.a. Department Chairs/Program Coordinators/Deans will be responsible for ensuring that all distance learning program materials clearly and accurately represent the program, including detailed program completion requirements, the nature of the learning experience, programs and faculty responsibilities, and the nature of faculty-student, student-faculty, and student-student interaction opportunities, techniques, and requirements.

6.01.b. Instructors and Department Chairs will be responsible for ensuring that all distance learning course materials clearly and accurately represent the course, including the nature of the learning experience, faculty responsibilities, and the nature of faculty-student, student-faculty, and student-student interaction opportunities, techniques, and requirements. In the case of hybrid courses, information regarding the percentage of the course to be done at a distance and the nature of that experience will be provided to students during course registration and will accurately represent the expectations.

6.02 Instructors and Department Chairs will be responsible for ensuring that all distance learning program/course materials clearly and accurately define any specific student background, knowledge, or technical skills needed to undertake and successfully complete the distance learning course(s), and describe in layman's terms any course-specific technical equipment and/or software required or recommended.

6.03 PSU students enrolled in distance learning will have access to academic support, library services, advising, course registration, and financial aid assistance, appropriate for distance learning students (i.e., distance learning students will not be required to come to campus in order to obtain these services). Technology assistance is available through the helpdesk.

6.04 Students may obtain academic advising and other support services by phone, e-mail, or in-person. Program materials clearly describe how students obtain these support services.

6.05 The institution provides adequate library and information resources, services, and support for academic programs, including training in information literacy. These resources and services are accessible at a distance on a timely basis. Through Plymouth State University library's web pages, access is maintained to scholarly databases and to the online catalog of materials owned by the libraries. Interlibrary loan service is accessible to distance learning students via the web page to borrow materials from our libraries. Resource material is available electronically through this system and also via postal delivery for items that cannot be transmitted electronically. Personal assistance is available from the librarians

and staff via email and telephone.

6.06 Administrative processes such as admissions and registration are readily accessible to distance students via the my.plymouth.edu web site. Students will be provided with e-mail accounts and access to the university's portal. Students can register online and access course schedules, grades, degree audits, financial aid and billing information. Tuition payments can be made online. Additionally, the book store is available via the web, and all books and course materials can be purchased online. Program materials clearly describe how access is obtained.

6.07 The institution provides orientation opportunities and resources for distance learners that are appropriate to the technologies used, the content, and the learners.

7. Outcomes Assessment

7.01 Distance learning programs are expected to produce the same learning outcomes as comparable classroom-based programs. The procedure for assessing and evaluating these outcomes will be similar to the procedures used for other programs at Plymouth State University.

7.02 All programs at PSU are designed to be coherent; the components each serve a purpose and build on one another (whether sequentially or in parallel) to achieve predetermined, measurable learning outcomes. Sometimes specific courses are identified as the means of achieving specific program goals and objectives (such as writing in the discipline). It is up to each department to establish a plan for how each course fits into programs, how courses build on one another, and in which courses each program goal is addressed.

7.03 The means chosen for assessing student learning are appropriate to the program content, course learning design, available technologies, and characteristics of the learners. The instruments used for assessing student learning online may be different from those used for assessing learning in the traditional classroom.

Online course activities generate more written records of student thinking (in discussion boards, for example), which distance learning instructors may archive and analyze later in detail (looking for timely appearance in discussions of key words and phrases, for example). In keeping this extensive course "paper trail", security is paramount, and student privacy is always protected.

8. Program Evaluation

8.01 The institution has processes in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of its programs, including distance learning programs on a regular basis, both at the course and program level. Each course or program has assessment activities embedded within it that allow the instructor and the student to compare the extent to which learning outcomes were achieved. Examples of assessment activities employed in distance learning at PSU include surveys of current and former students, electronic portfolios, standardized tests (in-house or externally administered), and the Student Course Evaluation (Appendix B).

Periodic program reviews examine all programs, including distance-learning programs, for

their effectiveness in accordance with item 4.10, outlined in this document.

8.01.a. Every online and hybrid course will make the PSU Student Course Evaluation (Appendix B) available in the LMS two weeks prior to the conclusion of full-semester courses and one week prior to intensive courses. Students and faculty will be notified via email when the surveys have been deployed. Survey results will be anonymous.

8.01.b. Student Course Evaluations will be reviewed in a timely manner by the Program Coordinators/Chairs and will be shared with the Department Chairs and Provost/Deans as per item 4.10

8.02 The evaluation results are used for continuous program improvement. Program Coordinators/Directors/Chairs and instructors monitor student progress and student complaints and develop intervention strategies utilizing academic support staff (e.g. Academic Advising, tutors, the Writing Center) where needed.

8.03 Program evaluation procedures include a determination that distance learning programs result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the college degree or certificate awarded. All graduate and undergraduate programs (traditional and online) demonstrate that students achieve deep learning. Program evaluation surveys will be administered apart from Student Evaluation Surveys.

9. Learning Management System

9.01 All distant learning courses will use the Learning Management System provided by the university to ensure compliance with federal regulations regarding verifying student identification.

9.02 All courses offered at PSU will have a presence on the LMS. Each course, by default, will be made unavailable to students. Instructors using the LMS for instruction are responsible for making their course(s) available to students prior to the first day of class. Those wishing to offer courses in an online or hybrid format must comply with the policies and procedures outlined elsewhere in this document.

9.03 Information Technology Services and LTOE will maintain the LMS and ensure its operation at or near 100% at all times. In the event that the LMS is taken offline for maintenance, faculty and students will receive notification from the Learning Technologies and Online Education in as timely a manner as possible. Where possible, notification will be given at least twenty-four hours before the interruption of service. Notification will include the expected length of downtime.

9.04 The students and instructors of each particular course section will be added via a direct feed from Banner. After the initial feed, instructors will be responsible for the accuracy of their particular course roster; however, instructors cannot officially add students to a course without the approval of the registrar.

9.04.a Faculty may add visiting students, visiting instructors, guests, and teaching assistants to their courses, accepting responsibility for obtaining any required approvals, or fulfilling any other requirements or procedures that may exist in policies not covered in this document.

9.05 All courses will be held on the LMS for three years, at which time they will be removed.

Instructors will be given notice at least one month prior to the removal of courses. Instructors are responsible for exporting any of the course materials they wish to archive. Plymouth State University is not responsible for archiving courses, including course statistics.

9.06 All PSU instructors and students will receive a PSU email account, accessible via my.plymouth.edu. PSU considers this email account (username@mail.plymouth.edu) the exclusive vehicle for official university e-mail communication. As such, username@mail.plymouth.edu will be considered the official e-mail address for writing and forwarding electronic correspondence. All users are expected to regularly check their PSU e-mail account and to acknowledge messages in a timely manner. In addition, all users are responsible for managing their disk quota such that there is room for new mail to arrive. Any electronic business conducted with the university must be done via a plymouth.edu account.

9.07 Accessibility to a course will be limited to the assigned instructor(s), registered students, the Department Chair, Learning Technologies and Online Education (for the purpose of assisting students or instructors with various issues), and those individuals who have been given written permission to access a course (see sections 4.10 and 4.10a).

9.08 The LMS role of Administrator will be limited to the members of PSU's LTOE and the Network Administrator. System Support Personnel, however, shall not be authorized to enter any courses for any other purpose than those stated above. Individual instructors may authorize a system support person permission to enter his/her course.

Appendix A: Course Evaluation Criteria

The following checklist is derived from Quality Matters standards, SLN course quality standards, and standards used at Niagara Community College, edited to fit Plymouth State University.

1. Course Overview

1.1 Instructions regarding how to get started and where to find various course components are clearly visible.

1.2 The syllabus introduces the student to the purpose of the course and to its components; in the case of a hybrid course, the syllabus clarifies the percentage of the course that will be online and the relationship between the f2f and online components.

- * 1.2.1 Instructor and student expectations for the course are listed.
- * 1.2.2 Course outcomes are clearly stated (see item #2 below)
- * 1.2.3 Course Learning Activities, detailing each type of learning activity.
- * 1.2.4 Course schedule, reading assignments and due dates are clearly articulated.

1.3 Etiquette expectations (netiquette) for online discussions, email, and other forms of communication are clearly stated.

1.4 A self-introduction by the instructor is available and includes contact information (can

include email, phone, IM name, photo, etc) and response time, and office hours and location of office hours.

1.5 Required text, materials (including software and hardware), and resources are stated clearly for students

2. Learning Objectives, Assessments and Measurements

2.1 The course and module objectives describe outcomes that are measurable

2.2 All learning objectives are stated clearly and written from the students' perspective. (e.g. "Student will be able to identify and explain..." "Student will be able to analyze...")

2.3 The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.

2.4 The course grading policies and criteria for evaluation are stated clearly.

2.5 Specific and descriptive criteria are provided for the evaluation of students' work and participation, including due dates and approximate times when students can expect to receive feedback and evaluations.

3. Resources and Materials

3.1 All resources and materials used in the course are appropriately cited (copyright and fair use).

3.2 Details regarding acquisition of required text materials and resources are clear to students

3.3 Course materials include a variety of media: visual, textual and auditory.

4. Learner Engagement

4.1 Time frames for all course activities are clearly communicated.

4.2 Learning activities present students with the opportunity for some real-world challenges that require them to apply their relevant skills and knowledge.

4.3 Learning activities foster interaction: instructor-student, content-student, and student-student (unless inappropriate).

* 4.3.1 The requirements for student interaction are clearly articulated.

* 4.3.2 Methods, topics and expectations are clear

* 4.3.3 Length and nature of postings in forums are clearly communicated

* 4.3.4 Whether and how interactions will be evaluated is clear

4.4 Course provides various visual, textual, auditory and/or kinesthetic activities to enhance student learning.

5. Learning Support

5.1 A clear description of institution-specific support services/resources is included (student services, Help Desk, Library, writing and math centers tutoring, TA, bookstore, disability services, campus life, etc)

5.2 Information regarding academic integrity and plagiarism policies is provided.

6. Course Technology

6.1 Navigation cues throughout the online components of the course are logical, consistent, and efficient.

6.2 Instructions on how to access resources at a distance are sufficient and easy to understand.

7. Content Presentation

7.1 Writing style (tone/voice), naming conventions, labels, titles, instructional and navigational cues throughout the online components of the course are logical, consistent, and efficient.

8. Accessibility

8.1 The course incorporates ADA standards and reflect conformance with institutional policy regarding accessibility in online and hybrid courses.

8.2 Course pages and course materials provide equivalent alternatives to critical auditory and visual content (including text).

8.3 Course pages have links that are self-describing and meaningful.

8.4 The course ensures screen readability (alt tags are used for all images)

Note: all courses must include an online Student Course Evaluation. Unless and until this is automatically added by the system, instructors must add this manually.

Appendix B: Student Course Evaluation

(This is currently only a place holder--the commons questions will be developed by the Assessment Committee)

<p>Introduction</p> <p>The following is an evaluation survey for the online class you are completing this session.</p> <p>Your choice to participate or not participate can in no way affect your grade and/or your standing in the class. Your participation in the survey <i>will be kept completely anonymous</i> from the instructor and staff.</p> <p>We take what you have to say very seriously and will use your constructive criticisms to improve the course for future sections.</p>
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Appendix C: Agreement for Course Development (Stipends)

AGREEMENT for COURSE DEVELOPMENT

This agreement outlines the responsibilities of _____ and Plymouth State University (PSU), a New Hampshire 501 (c) (3) corporation located in Plymouth, N.H. for the terms of this agreement. The signatures below of the duly authorized representatives of both parties indicate the assent of both parties to the terms and conditions of this agreement.

A. Purpose

The purpose of this agreement is to set forth the terms and conditions of the academic services to be provided by _____ (to be known as the Course Developer--CD) to develop an online/hybrid course for _____ to be taught at Plymouth State University.

B. Contract Period

This Contract shall begin in _____ and shall end upon the completion of the course as determined by the contracting division/school and the Learning Technologies and Online Education, ready for delivery by _____.

C. Deliverables

The CD will successfully develop a course that meets the following guidelines

1. The course will contain a list of measurable objectives
2. A variety of assessments will be used, and will match course objectives
3. The course will be ADA compliant
4. The course will use a Topic Outline/Module construction
5. Course materials will include the use of Rich Media (multi-media)
6. Course will make use of various web 2.0 tools (forums/discussion board, wikis, etc) to encourage interaction and collaboration between students
7. Course will be built in the University's Learning Management System

At the end of the contract period, the course will be copied over (in tact) to a Master Course Shell.

D. Academic Consultant Responsibilities

1. The CD agrees to submit the course to Learning Technologies and Online Education for review during the development process and prior to the final review. This will include an initial meeting by _____ and interim meetings by _____ and _____. The course will be ready for final review by _____.
2. The CD will make any revisions or modifications to the courses for quality improvement after teaching the course once. If the CD has not been previously certified by Learning Technologies and Online Education to teach online, the CD will successfully complete the online training program with that Department.
3. The online course will follow guidelines established by Learning Technologies and Online Education for quality
4. The CD agrees to complete any administrative paperwork required by PSU.

E. PSU Responsibilities

1. Staff from the Learning Technologies and Online Education will be available to offer any online training needed to complete the contract.
2. Staff from the Learning Technologies and Online Education will offer support throughout the course development process.
3. PSU shall provide payment of _____ for the services as detailed in this agreement once the online course has been through a quality review by Learning Technologies and Online Education and approved the Chair of the applicable department and the Dean of the appropriate school.

F. Intellectual Property

Both parties agree that the University holds joint ownership of copyright if copyright is sought and further agrees that while the CD retains publication rights, the University retains a perpetual, royalty-free, non-exclusive right to the material.

Approved by:

Course Developer: _____ Date: _____

Dean: _____ Date: _____

Learning Technologies and Online Education: Name and Title Date: _____