HSC OP: 60.12, Distance Education

Purpose: The purpose of this Health Sciences Center Operating Policy and Procedure (HSC OP) is to specify how electronically delivered instruction in academic courses shall be conducted in each of the university’s Schools to meet the university mission of providing excellence in the education of health care professionals.

Review: This HSC OP will be reviewed on October 1 of every even-numbered year (ENY) by the Deans of the schools and the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, with recommendations for revisions forwarded to the Provost by November 1.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. Foreword
   a. The rights and responsibilities of the university, its employees, and its students in the distance education enterprise must be articulated clearly and applied consistently so that issues regarding ownership, control, evaluation, and operation of the TTUHSC’s distance education programs may be resolved satisfactorily. The purpose of this policy is to specify how these issues shall be addressed.
   b. Distance education is defined as a course in which the majority of the instruction occurs when the students and instructor are not in the same physical setting. For some reporting purposes, distance education may refer to an educational activity, such as a clinical rotation, practicum, internship, or externship, in which the student is engaged in a formal learning experience outside the state of Texas.
   c. Unless otherwise specified below, all current policies that apply to traditional face-to-face delivery of academic coursework shall also apply to distance education coursework.

2. Definitions
   The definition of distance education varies across regulatory agencies and accrediting bodies. Several key definitions are included below for reference.
   a. In alignment with the Department of Education’s (USED) definition, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) defines distance education as the following:
      “Distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous.”
   b. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) uses the following definition:
      “The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are not in the same physical setting for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction. Distance education can include courses and programs offered online, off-campus face-to-face, and electronic-to-groups. Coordinating Board rules recognize two categories of distance education courses: fully distance education courses and hybrid/blended courses. A fully distance education course is defined as a course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions totaling no more than 15 percent of the instructional time. A hybrid/blended course...
is defined as a course in which a majority (more than 50 percent but less than 85 percent) of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place."

c. The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) defines distance education as:

"Instruction offered by any means where the student and faculty member are in separate physical locations. It includes, but is not limited to, online, interactive video and correspondence courses or programs." Supervised field experiences and out-of-state learning placements are also considered distance education for purposes of NC-SARA.

3. **Procedures**

   a. **Educational Support**

      1) All TTUHSC students receiving instruction through distance education shall be provided appropriate access to student support services. These services shall include access to admissions, course registration, academic advising, student orientation, textbooks and materials, financial aid, career development, and other special program accommodations as applicable under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

      2) The TTUHSC Library shall provide support for distance education courses and programs that is appropriate. Elements of library support available to students taking distance education courses include electronic document delivery, electronic journals, full-text databases, end-user searching, reference assistance and instruction, network access, and interlibrary loan services.

      3) All TTUHSC distance education students shall have access to technology support that is appropriate.

      4) All TTUHSC faculty members who teach courses through distance education shall be provided professional support in adopting instructional techniques and strategies that are appropriate for electronically delivered courses. Such support shall be provided by each School and/or program within TTUHSC.

   b. **Coordination and Oversight**

      1) The eLearning Council will provide leadership in determining academic policies, procedures and priorities concerning distance education. Council members include: faculty representatives from each school appointed by the respective Dean, Information Technology/Education representatives from each school, a representative from Institutional Information Technology appointed by the Vice President for Information Technology, the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, the Director for Student Disability Services and the Senior Director of Academic Planning and Compliance. The Associate Provost for Academic Affairs will serve as Chair of eLearning Council. Appointments will be reviewed annually or as needed.

      The eLearning Council is responsible for:

      (i) Providing support on all institutional level regulatory, reporting, and accreditation matters that specifically pertain to distance education

      (ii) Providing guidance on the institutional Learning Management Systems that provide centralized access points for information on electronically delivered courses, programs, and resources

      (iii) Coordinating the verification of online and hybrid courses based on the TTUHSC Principles of Good Practice for Online and Hybrid Courses
(iv) Coordinating professional development opportunities to enhance faculty knowledge and application of effective teaching practices in distance education
(v) Working collaboratively with schools to ensure compliance with state authorization requirements
(vi) Under the direction of the Vice Provost, work collaboratively with TTUHSC schools to ensure compliance with THECB and SACSCOC requirements related to the implementation and delivery of distance education courses and programs
(vii) Working collaboratively with schools to ensure compliance with Department of Education requirements related to the implementation and delivery of distance education courses and programs
(viii) Providing guidance for the development and maintenance of a website for distance education at TTUHSC
(ix) Monitoring School compliance with the responsibilities described below (Section 3.b.2)

The eLearning Council reports to the Provost through the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs.

2) Schools
Each School will ensure:
(i) Adherence to requirements of SACSCOC, THECB, NC-SARA and USED related to distance education
(ii) Identification of institutional resource needs and allocation of resources to support the delivery of distance education
(iii) Facilitation of support services for students and faculty who are engaged in instruction via distance education
(iv) Assistance to programs in the development and/or revision of distance education curricula
(v) Processes are in place to verify student identity at the time of enrollment and continuously throughout the coursework and/or program. This includes defining acceptable academic activities related to attendance in a distance education course
(vi) Retention of course materials will follow the retention timeframe outlined in HSC OP 10.09, Records Retention
(vii) TTUHSC has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs
(viii) that students are notified in writing at the time of registration or enrollment, of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity
(ix) identification of appropriate assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of distance education

C. Programs, Course Offerings, and Ownership of Instructional Materials

1) Schools are responsible for deciding which courses and/or programs will be offered electronically.

2) Schools are responsible for ensuring the academic rigor of programs and the quality of instruction in all courses and/or programs offered electronically.

3) Faculty members are responsible for ensuring the integrity of student work in courses and programs offered electronically.

4) Proposals for new courses and/or programs to be offered electronically shall be developed, reviewed, and approved in the same manner as proposals for face-to-face courses and/or programs.

5) Ownership of instructional materials that are developed for distance education courses and the revenue derived from the creation of software or other media products that are developed for distance education courses shall be determined in
d. Assessment

Each school should develop a formal process by which distance education courses are evaluated to ensure the rigor of courses and curriculum, as well as the quality of instruction.

1) Each course offered via distance education will be evaluated by students. In addition to evaluating instruction, students should evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning management system, academic and student support services, and other course-related criteria.

2) Distance education programs will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Criteria may include student learning outcomes, integration of curricula and technology, student satisfaction, student retention, and pass rates for licensing exams, if applicable.

3) On an annual basis, instructors of record for online and hybrid courses must verify that their courses adhere to the TTUHSC Principles of Good Practice for Online and Hybrid Courses. If an instructor is unable to verify a course, s/he can postpone verification until the next semester in order to complete appropriate course revisions. This PGP verification process is coordinated by the eLearning Council.