

# Northwestern State University

## Guidelines For Online Programs



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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of guidelines for online teaching. This document is not intended to be all inclusive, but does provide a foundation in support of electronic learning. It is with best practices in mind that this document guides the development and delivery of online courses at Northwestern State University.

## **Standards**

According to the Southern Association of Courses and Schools, the policy listed below should apply to distance learning courses:

### **SACS Distance and Correspondence Education Policy**

1. At the time of review by the Commission, the institution demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (1) a secure login and pass code, (2) proctored examinations, and (3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.
2. At the time of review by the Commission, the institution demonstrates that it has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.
3. At the time of review by the Commission, the institution demonstrates that it has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.
4. An institution that offers distance or correspondence education must ensure that it reports accurate headcount enrollment on its annual Institutional Profile submitted to the Commission.
5. Institutions must ensure that their distance and correspondence education courses and programs comply with the Principles of Accreditation. This applies to all educational programs and services, wherever located or however delivered.

### **NC-SARA Participation**

The University is a participant of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and agrees with and adheres to the following requirements:

- The principal campus or central administrative unit remains domiciled in a state or district that has joined the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) initiative and is authorized to operate in that state.
- The Institution retains its accreditation by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
- The institution agrees to abide by the Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education as summarized in SARA policy 5(2)1-9 and current NC-SARA Policies and Standards.
- The institution agrees to maintain responsibility for the actions of any third-party providers used by the institution to engage in operations under SARA.
- The institution agrees to notify its home state's portal agency of any negative changes to its accreditation status.

- The institution agrees to provide data necessary to monitor SARA activities as requested by NC-SARA or the state portal agency.
- The institution agrees to work with its home state's portal agency to resolve any complaints arising from its students in SARA states, and to abide by decisions of that entity.
- The institution applies to its home state's portal agency for renewal over the signature of the institution's CEO or chief academic officer.
- The institution agrees to notify in writing all students in a course or program that customarily leads to professional licensure, or which a student could reasonably believe leads to such licensure, whether or not the course or program meets requirements for licensure in the state where the student resides. If an institution does not know whether the course or program meets licensure requirements in the student's state of residence, the institution may meet this SARA requirement by informing the student in writing and providing the student the contact information for the appropriate state licensing board(s). An e-mail dedicated solely to this purpose and sent to the student's best known e-mail address meets this requirement. The institution should use other means to notify the student if needed.
- The institution agrees, in cases where the institution cannot fully deliver the instruction for which a student has contracted, to provide a reasonable alternative for delivering the instruction or reasonable financial compensation for the education they did not receive.
- The institution agrees to pay to the state any state fees for SARA participation required by the home state for administering SARA.
- The institution agrees to pay its annual SARA participation fee to the National Council for SARA (NC-SARA). This single annual fee replaces any fees that the institution would ordinarily pay to other SARA member states.

The University's compliance website is located at: <http://compliance.nsula.edu/>.

# University Guidelines

## Institutional Context and Commitment

### Mission and Goals

#### Mission

*Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern State University prepares its students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region.*

- To create an environment that supports individual efforts toward academic, career, social and civic success.
- To make Northwestern State University the premier regional university in the state.
- To work together and create an environment of excellence.
- To develop and enhance relationships which are mutually beneficial to both the university and its stakeholder(s).

#### Role

The delivery of online courses has been identified as an important strategy through which the university can achieve its mission. Northwestern encourages the use of electronic media for course delivery as a way to reach citizens in our largely rural service area, who may not have the means to travel to the Natchitoches campus to complete a degree, or individuals throughout the state, nation, and world seeking to accomplish educational goals.

#### *Course Identification/Selection*

- The selection of method of course delivery will be made by the Dean of the College/Department Head/Instructor, and when requested, upon the recommendation of the Electronic and Continuing Education Staff, who will identify the equipment, software, and support necessary.
- The selection of a course to be leased or purchased from outside of the University will be made by the Dean of the College, and/or Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development. It is not the instructor's prerogative to develop a course that has not been approved for electronic delivery.

#### *Development and Delivery of Locally Produced Electronic Courses*

- When the faculty member and the Dean of the College, and when required, in consultation with the Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development agree on a course for development, the Dean of the College will determine if faculty will be given any form of compensation in order to produce the course.

- If a course is developed as part of a grant funded program, compensation will be in accordance with the grant funding guidelines.
- The size of a class should be considered carefully by the appropriate Dean and Department Head as it relates to instruction and course content. The use of creativity to maximize capacity without impacting quality is encouraged.
- Northwestern State University Policy will determine ownership and copyright in accordance with policies set forth by the State Board of Supervisors and the Louisiana Board of Regents.
- The design and development of electronic learning credit and non-credit modules, courses, certificates, and programs should follow priorities established by the college as informed by educational requirements, market studies, societal demand, community and business needs, and the competitive advantage of Northwestern State University. Offerings may include instruction for undergraduates, those in professional and graduate degree programs, other advanced degree programs, practitioner-oriented programs, specialized professional development and K-12 outreach efforts.
- Electronic courses should be designed according to those academic standards utilized for regular courses and the standards identified by SACS.
- Once the course has met approval by the department, the course must then be submitted to The Registrar's office for inclusion into the class schedules.

#### *Development and Delivery of Locally Produced Electronic Professional Development*

- Department requests for development course shells are directed to the e-Learning Support Specialist.
- The eLearning Support Specialist reviews requests and conducts follow-up to gain any additional pertinent information related to the request. (i.e. audience, availability, timeline for implementation, etc.)
- Upon receipt of requested information, a request for approval to create the course shell will be sent to the Vice President of Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development
- Once approved, the shell will be created and developers notified of availability.
- The Office of Electronic and Continue Education staff will provide assistance with course development as needed.
- Completed courses will be reviewed as appropriate by the Course Review Team (CRT) and revisions completed in consult with the course developer(s).
  - Course Review Team Members include:
    - eLearning Support Specialist
    - Instructional Design Specialist
    - Media Development Specialist
    - Electronic Application Support Specialist
- Upon review by the CRT and revisions completed notification of approval will be sent to developers/instructors and department head.
- Approved developed course will then be moved into production.

### **Program Approval Process**

When a college decides to offer an entire program online, the proposal should be submitted to the Council of Academic Officers, who will determine whether the program is in line with the University's stated mission and goals. Upon approval by the Council of Academic Officers, the program proposal is submitted by the Council of Academic Officers to the Board of Regents, and as required, a substantive change request is presented to SACS.

SACS substantive change policy: <https://sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/SubstantiveChange.pdf>

### **Students and Student Services**

NSU provides a host of online services to students, including but not limited to online admission, registration, financial aid, fee payment, email, student help desk, and the student portal.

The ability of a student to succeed in online classes depends on his or her ability to understand the class structure and technology. Prior to enrollment in online courses, students are informed of prerequisite technology skills required to succeed in the online environment. Prospective students have the opportunity to complete an online self-assessment of their ability to succeed in online courses. Students are also advised by academic advisors prior to enrollment.

A list of the minimum computer requirements for participation in online courses is also located on the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education web site.

Instructors are encouraged to provide information related to academic student resources either through advising or through links posted within their online classes. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that any information provided is accurate and up to date. It is suggested that, at a minimum, instructors provide links to library services, student technical assistance, and the Office of Disability Services.

Syllabi for online courses should include the same content-related information as required by the academic department for face to face courses. In addition to that information, a syllabus for an online course should include:

- Email Address
- ISBN of textbook, if any
- Information regarding any required proctored testing
- Special Software/Hardware Requirements
- Etiquette Expectations (Netiquette)
- Instructor response time for emails and checking assignments
- Minimum technology skills expected of the student
- Student participation/interaction requirements
- Others as required or recommended by Quality Matters (QM)

Watson Memorial Library (available on-line at: <http://library.nsula.edu>) provides students on-campus and off-campus electronic access to library resources, including:

- The Library Online Catalog.
- Remote access with full text capability.
- Academic databases and/or indexes to periodicals.
- Access to libraries with the NSU system.
- Electronic journals and books.
- Cammie G. Henry Research Center.

Faculty can receive assistance from Watson Memorial Library's staff in determining availability of online resources.

Specialized services offered for online learners include:

- On-line Interlibrary Loan Request forms.
- E-mail reference assistance.
- Online tutorial on using web-based catalogs.
- Online capabilities to renew books.
- A toll free 800 number.
- Access to account information concerning the library.

A Student Online Support desk, funded by Student Technology Fees, is available by telephone and e-mail for students who are experiencing technical problems with their computers, email, or the course management software. The hours of operation are located online at: <https://www.nsula.edu/its/student-helpdesk/>. Students can also use the help desk website to receive answers to commonly asked questions.

### **Faculty Support**

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education will provide appropriate professional development relevant to the delivery of online courses. This professional development may include, but is not limited to, basic computer proficiency, use of the course management system, and instructional design. If scheduled to teach an online course, an instructor at a minimum, should participate in a course management system session.

The university provides a Course Management System to deliver online courses and *university* email accounts through which faculty communicate with their students.

The academic departments and/or Information Technology Services ensure that faculty members have appropriate hardware and software.

## **Resources for Learning**

Within online courses, instructors are responsible for ensuring that students are provided with appropriate electronic resources related to course content. This may include links to online web references and links to any plug-ins necessary for downloading course materials.

Faculty members are responsible for providing approved accommodations as specified by the Office of Disability Support.

The university provides various learning resources for online students including, but not limited to:

- Course Management System
- Email
- Library resources
- Student portal (my NSU)
- Computer labs
- Tutoring services
- Student Help Desk

NSU Student Online Support (SOS) Procedure:

Student Online Support provides support for the following systems:

- myNSU
- Office365
- Wireless access
- Course management system

NSU help desk personnel will work with students to determine the cause of student computer issues. If a problem is found with NSU systems, the problem will be resolved by the appropriate NSU staff. If the problem is isolated to a student's personal computer (hardware or software), suggestions or recommendations may be provided, but it will be the student's responsibility to fix the problem. NSU employees will not alter student personal computers.

The use of the university course management system, email, and the student portal is monitored by Information Technology Services. The use of departmental computer labs is monitored by the departments; Student Tech Fee labs are monitored by the Student Tech Fee staff.

## **Commitment to Support**

The university has invested significant monies into hardware and software required to host online courses.

Northwestern ensures that each online program can be completed by students within a predictable time frame by providing a course rotation.

Northwestern is committed to providing professional development programs for development and delivery of online courses.

## **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**

### **Qualified Faculty**

As per university hiring practices, the department head or dean is responsible for reviewing the credentials of any potential faculty member to determine whether an applicant possesses appropriate academic credentials. The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education can assist in evaluating a potential new hire's technical competency.

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education will provide appropriate professional development relevant to the delivery of online courses. This professional development may include, but is not limited to, basic computer proficiency, course management system basics, and instructional design. If scheduled to teach an online course, an instructor, at a minimum, should participate in an orientation session for the course management system utilized by the university.

As part of our on-going commitment to professional development and excellence in online teaching, the University offers an *Online Teaching Boot Camp Program*. Adjuncts and new full-time faculty are required to complete the boot camp before teaching an online class.

### **Academic Standards/Student Learning**

Courses and degree programs are selected to be offered online by departments, in consultation with the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education and University administration. Once a department has approval to place a degree program online, the course development process begins. The development of a specified sequence of courses to be delivered to fulfill program requirements (course rotation) ensures that students can complete the program within a reasonable and predictable time frame.

It is the responsibility of each department to ensure that online courses meet the same academic standards as courses being offered face to face. Course stewards/department heads should review each course prior to delivery in order to ensure that the online version of a course covers the same material and produces the same learning outcomes as the face to face version of the course.

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education provides a rubric for the evaluation of online course content that is unique to the online environment.

### **Guidelines for Interaction within Online Courses**

Online courses will provide appropriate opportunities for interaction between faculty and students and among students.

- Instructors should log in to the online course multiple days (minimum of three) within any given week in order to read and respond to messages posted by students.
- Instructors should check email daily, and respond to email from students within 48 hours, or as specified in the syllabus.
- Instructors should provide timely feedback on assignments.
- Students should be encouraged to share ideas with one another via asynchronous discussion board posts, group activities, email and/or live chat opportunities.
- Instructors should contact any student before dropping them from a course in which they are enrolled to ensure the student has not encountered extenuating circumstances such as military deployment, illness, etc. which precluded proper notification to the instructor.

Courses and instructors will be evaluated in order to ensure that content remains current and effective teaching methods are employed. This course evaluation may include:

- Student evaluation of instructors
- Department head/course steward evaluation of course
- Peer/Mentor evaluation of courses
- Course completion/pass rates

There will be administrative access available for the appropriate administration as related to evaluation.

Department heads and/or mentors will work with faculty members to address any deficiencies that are found.

At Northwestern State University, each Department Head/Dean is responsible for the content that is delivered in each course, and for ensuring that each instructor facilitates his or her courses effectively. Each new instructor should be assigned a mentor by his or her department, who observes the new instructor's teaching throughout the semester and provides answers to that instructor's questions as necessary throughout the semester. The mentor should have prior successful experience teaching online. This mentor can provide support related to content, university policies and procedures, and best practices in course facilitation.

### **Course Evaluation**

It is the responsibility of the departments to conduct evaluation of courses in a timely manner and to ensure that content is kept up-to-date.

Elements to be evaluated *may include* the following:

- Audience and grade level
- Breadth of coverage
- Writing style and accuracy
- Course orientation and syllabus
- Statement of learning objectives
- Exercises, projects, and activities
- Additional text material

- Instructional philosophy
- Navigation
- Student accessibility of course progress information
- Structure for timely feedback
- Consistency of placement of elements and presentation
- Pedagogical features
- Effectiveness of multimedia elements
- Text
- Accommodation of a variety of media types and learning styles
- Student interaction with the content
- Assessment Methods
- Assessment Grading
- Grading Rubrics
- Support materials for the student
- Course effectiveness and structure

These were adapted from the Online Course Evaluation Project, a joint venture between the Monterey Institute for Technology in Education, WCET, and EduTools.

#### **Student Evaluation of Courses**

Students are asked to complete an evaluation of each course at the end of the semester. The University Planning, Assessment, and EEO Office is responsible for the creation of this survey instrument and for analyzing and disseminating the results. Information Technology Systems maintains the database and the web interface required for the online delivery of the survey to students. Results of the student evaluation are distributed to department heads, who may use these results as one element of faculty evaluation. Instructors are also provided with copies of their survey results.

#### **Faculty Evaluation**

Faculty members, whether teaching traditionally or online, are evaluated on an annual basis as stated in the faculty handbook. Each faculty member must be evaluated under the guidelines set forth by the university. Faculty members are evaluated on their teaching effectiveness as well as their scholarly and professional activities. Documents such as student evaluations of teaching, department head/coordinator or dean evaluation, student appraisal of academic advising, and self-reporting activities are used as methods of evaluation. Online courses may be visited as a part of the evaluation process.

**Program Evaluation**

The Office of Institutional Research gathers and presents data on student retention and graduation rates.

Departments, where applicable, track students beyond graduation. The results are used to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program and applicability of the program to students' careers.

**Course Ownership/Intellectual Property**

See online Faculty Handbook: <https://www.nsula.edu/wp-content/uploads/FacultyHandbook2017.pdf>.