

Lamar State College Orange
Distance Education Handbook



Lamar State College
— Orange —

Office of Learning Technology

Table of Contents

Distance Education Mission Statement and Introduction.....	3
Distance Education Committee	6
New Course Development Process.....	7
Distance Education Course Proposal Forms.....	8
Standards of Distance Education	8
Distance Education Faculty Training	11
Evaluations: Distance Education Approval/ Mid-Semester Evaluation	12
Blackboard and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).....	12
Copyright Law and Blackboard.....	13
LSCO Distance Education Best Practices Recommendations.....	13
References	14

Distance Education Mission Statement and Introduction

Lamar State College Orange (LSCO) will provide quality Distance Education opportunities for students in support of the vision and mission of the college. Part of LSCO's vision and mission is to: "improve the quality of life for the citizens of Orange County and surrounding environs" by being an open admissions college as well as providing traditional and online delivery systems that offer numerous courses for academic and technical degrees. LSCO's four core values are "excellence, diversity, community and student success" which is also reflected in the distance education platform and instruction of the college. The Distance Education program adheres to The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) rules and best practices for distance education as well as maintains compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and School (SACSCOC) standards.

Definition of distance education as given by THECB:

Distance Education Course – A course in which a majority (more than 50%) of the instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place. For the purposes of this policy, there are two categories of distance education courses:

1. Fully Distance Education Course – A course which may have mandatory face-to-face sessions which total no more than 15% of the instructional time (Example: orientation session, laboratory, exam review, or an in-person test).
2. Hybrid/Blended Courses – A course in which a majority, (more than 50%) but less than (85%), of the planned instruction occurs when the students and instructor(s) are not in the same place.

Distance education degree or certificate program – A program in which a student may complete a majority (more than 50%) of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses.

- The Learning Management system used for distance education at LSCO is primarily Blackboard, which is accessed through the Internet. Online courses are offered through Blackboard servers housed by Blackboard. To log in to these online classes, students must have secure login credentials to access the school portal. They can access the Internet either through their own Internet Service Provider or through computers located on campus.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Principles of Good Practices

Several assumptions are central to these principles:

1. The program or course offered electronically is provided by or through an institution that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and authorized to operate in the state where the program or course originates.
2. The institution's programs and courses holding specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when offered electronically.
3. The "institution" may be a single institution or a consortium of such institutions.
4. These principles are generally applicable to degree or certificate programs and to courses offered for academic credit.
5. It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs and courses it provides electronically and certify continued compliance with these principles.
6. Institutions offering programs or for-credit courses are responsible for satisfying all in-state approval and accreditation requirements before students are enrolled.

Curriculum and Instruction

- Each program or course results in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.
- A degree or certificate program or course offered electronically is coherent and complete.
- The program or course provides for appropriate interaction between faculty and students and among students.
- Qualified faculty provide appropriate oversight of the program or course that is offered electronically.
- Academic standards for all programs or courses offered electronically will be the same as those for programs or courses delivered by other means at the institution where the program or course originates.
- Student learning in programs or courses delivered electronically should be comparable to student learning in programs offered at the campus where the programs or courses originate.

Institutional Context and Commitment

Role and Mission

- The program or course is consistent with the institution's role and mission.
- Review and approval processes ensure the appropriateness of the technology being used to meet the objectives of the program or course.

Students and Student Services

- Program or course announcements and electronic catalog entries provide appropriate information.
- Students shall be provided with clear, complete, and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, assumptions about technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services and financial aid resources, and cost and payment policies.
- Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and student rights appropriate to support their learning.
- The institution has admission/acceptance criteria in place to assess the extent to which a student has the background, knowledge and technical skills required to undertake the program or course.
- Advertising, recruiting, and admissions materials clearly and accurately represent the program or course and the services available.

Faculty Support

- The program or course provides faculty support services specifically related to teaching via an electronic system.
- The institution assures appropriate training for faculty who teach via the use of technology.
- The institution provides adequate equipment, software, and communications access to faculty to support interaction with students, institutions, and other faculty.

Resources for Learning

- The institution ensures that appropriate learning resources are available to students.
- The institution evaluates the adequacy of, and the cost to students for, access to learning resources and it documents the use of electronic resources.

Commitment to Support

- Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate recognition of teaching and scholarly activities related to programs or courses offered electronically.
- The institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to continuation of the program or course for a period of time reasonable and sufficient for students to complete the course or program.

Evaluation and Assessment

- The institution evaluates the program's or courses' educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction.
- At the completion of the program or course, the institution provides for assessment and documentation of student achievement in each course.

SACSCOC Distance Education Definition and Standards:

For the purposes of the Commission on College's accreditation review, 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 and asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferences; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

In addition, SACSCOC lists a set of expectations for distance education. Among the expectations listed, curriculum and instruction and faculty are two crucial areas reflected in the LSCO Distance Education Handbook.

The SACSCOC guidelines for Curriculum and Instruction state:

- The faculty assumes primary responsibility for and exercises oversight of distance and correspondence education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.
- The technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs and courses and expectations concerning the use of such technology are clearly communicated to students.
- Distance and correspondence education policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products.

The SACSCOC guidelines for Faculty Expectations:

- An institution offering distance or correspondence learning courses/ programs ensures that there is a sufficient number of faculty qualified to develop, design, and teach the courses/ programs.
- The institution has clear criteria for the evaluation of faculty teaching distance education courses and programs.
- Faculty who teach in distance and correspondence education programs and courses receive appropriate training.

Institutional Effectiveness:

- Comparability of distance and correspondence education programs to campus-based programs and courses are ensured by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction.

Distance Education Committee

The focus of the LSCO Distance Education Committee is to provide Lamar State College Orange distance education with oversight, guidelines and best practices for the distance education program.

The distance education committee is charged with:

- Maintaining the *Distance Education Faculty Handbook*
- Approving new distance education courses
- Reviewing prior distance education courses
- Recommending and designing proper evaluation tools for distance education
- Researching and discussing new learning technologies
- Reviewing and recommending policies for distance education student success
- Evaluating and responding to issues/ needs regarding the Learning Management System
- Acting as a liaison for the distance education committee and corresponding educational departments
- Recommending and designing pedagogical training for distance education faculty
- Creating an ongoing list of best practices for faculty
- Addressing areas of concern for distance education

The distance education committee consists of:

- The Director of Learning Technology (*Committee Chair*)
- Two Representatives from the Information Services Department
- Two Representatives from the Health Sciences and Workforce Technology Department
- Two Representatives from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Department
- Two Representatives from the Education and Mathematics Department
- One Representative from the Learning Center
- The Vice President of Academic Affairs (*ex-officio*)
- The Director of Institutional Effectiveness (*ex-officio*)
- The Director of Institutional Research (*ex-officio*)
- The Chair of the Curriculum Committee (*ex-officio*)

Members of the distance education committee serve a minimum of a two-year appointment. Appointments are made by the individual department Division Directors and Dean. Members of the Distance Education Committee (DEC) can serve several consecutive years on the committee with permission from their immediate Division Directors or Dean. All voting members of the DEC must have completed the Blackboard Teaching Certification.

The DEC will plan to meet monthly during the fall and spring semesters unless there are no pressing issues for the committee to address. The DEC will not meet during the summer semesters. The Director of Learning Technology will coordinate meetings to best meet the committee's needs. The DEC will appoint a secretary to take minutes of the meetings. The committee minutes and materials will be provided to a closed group consisting of the current DEC on Blackboard.

New Course Development Process

(prior to starting a new online course process, the instructor has to be Blackboard certified)

1. Online Course Development Form is completed and signed by the Division Director/Dean and Director of Learning Technology.
2. Approval from the Distance Education Committee.
3. Instructor develops the entire course with due dates for anticipated teaching semester.
4. Distance Education committee assigns three peer-reviewers and Director of Learning Technology to review course.
5. Distance Education committee votes.
6. Any necessary revisions are made.
7. Course implemented.

Timeline and Checklist: Summer/Fall	Fully Online, Hybrid and E-pack course
December 31st	Submit Proposal for new course to be taught during the coming Summer/Fall Semester. Proposal to be submitted by the Division Director/Dean of the subject area department to the Director of Learning Technology. <i>*Instructor proposing the new course should already have attended mandatory Blackboard training sessions</i>
January	The request is given to the Distance Education Committee to proceed with course development. <i>*(approval by the DEC monthly meeting)</i>
January- February	Develop the entire new course in a Blackboard course shell.
March 1 st	Course should be completed and ready for Distance Education approval process.
March	DEC will review the course-for specific required criteria. DEC will provide a decision to approve, disapprove, and/or suggest changes.
April 1st	Any changes-necessary for the course to meet approval are made. Instructor notified of approval by Division Director and Director of Learning Technologies.
June-August	Teach Summer/Fall course

Timeline and Checklist: Spring	Fully Online, Hybrid and E-pack course
August 30 th	Submit Proposal for new course to be taught during the coming Spring Semester. Proposal to be submitted by the Division Director/Dean of the subject area department to the Director of Learning Technology. <i>*Instructor proposing the new course should already have attended mandatory Blackboard training sessions.</i>
September	The request is given to the Distance Education Committee to proceed with course development. <i>*(approval by the DEC monthly meeting)</i>
September- October	Develop the entire new course in a Blackboard course shell. Course should reflect Spring semester due dates.
November 1 st	Course should be completed and ready for Distance Education approval process.
November	DEC will review the course for specific required criteria. DEC will provide a decision to approve, disapprove, and/suggest changes.
November 30 th	Any changes to the course to meet approval are made. Instructor notified by Division Director and Director of Learning Technologies.
January	Teach Spring Course.

Distance Education Course Proposal Forms

The course proposal form for distance education courses will be reviewed annually to maintain the integrity of the document. The distance education course proposal form will be housed on Blackboard with faculty information.

Standards of Distance Education

Distance Education Course Standards for Students

- Attendance: Attendance for fully online classes is determined by the last participation in a course assignment or activity. Student attendance is not determined based on last login attempt of the class.
- Netiquette: Distance education courses offer a unique learning environment that can cause different social interactions than normally expected of a higher education classroom. Students are encouraged to read Virginia Shea's "The Core Rules of Netiquette". Shea states, "When you enter any new culture - - and cyberspace has its own culture - - you're liable to commit a few social blunders" ("The Core Rules of Netiquette"). The Netiquette core rules in Shea's materials will help prepare students for behavior in an online course.
- Dropping: Students must take the proper steps with Student Services to drop an online course. It is not the instructor's responsibility to drop students due to nonparticipation. Students taking an online course or who are unable to come to campus in person must follow the following process:
 - Email / meet with the instructor to communicate the desire to drop the course.

- If the student initiates the course drop via email, the instructor will forward the request to drop via email, with the instructor's approval, to Admissions.Records@lsc.edu. This communication should come from the instructor with his/her approval.
- The admissions office will process the request as of the date the student sent the email to the instructor. If it is after the last day to drop from the semester with academic penalty, instructors must forward their approval and student's email request to the VPAA for approval. The VPAA will then forward on to Admissions.Records@lsc.edu. Admissions will process the drop and notify the student.
- Student Complaints: A student who has a complaint regarding a distance education course should first communicate directly with the course instructor. Grievances that cannot be resolved between the student and instructor should then be taken to the Department Director or Dean overseeing the subject area for the course work in question.

Distance Education Standards for Faculty

- Communication: Faculty will communicate with students Monday through Friday with twenty-four hour response times. Emails sent after noon on Friday through Sunday will be answered on Monday at the instructor's earliest convenience. Faculty should provide students clear communication guidelines in the course syllabus.
- Course Availability: Courses are made available to students two days prior to the official start of class. Faculty should have each online section of a class ready and complete for this automatic system update. The course shell should have all the information required in the face-to-face/hybrid or fully distance education Blackboard template.
- Course Templates: Faculty will only use the approved Blackboard online course format template. The Distance Education committee is charged with researching best practices for distance education and creating a template that best suits LSCO.
- Distance Education Course Syllabus: Faculty will use the Distance Education Course Syllabus template for all distance education courses. Faculty can locate the template on the Blackboard faculty information page.
- Grading: Faculty are charged with keeping an up-to-date gradebook. Faculty should update gradebooks each week and maintain a clear guideline for grading practices. Student work should not go ungraded for longer than two weeks. Ungraded work that has surpassed the two week point should be addressed/explained to the class by the instructor. It is the instructor's duty to keep students informed regarding grading delays, etc. In addition, faculty are expected to use clear grading expectations, rubrics and feedback methods to help students better understand grades earned.
- Proctoring Tests: Faculty must make students aware on the first day of class of any requirements regarding proctoring tests. Students need to be made aware of the costs and technology required for proctored tests.
- Faculty Online Contact: Faculty are required to meet the same work expectations for a hybrid/distance education course as a regular face-to-face course. Faculty should be engaged in distance education courses, creating appropriate synchronous and asynchronous learning

opportunities, and checking course progress regularly during the work week. In addition, faculty should make available at least one hour of office hours for a virtual office hour. There are several methods by which faculty can participate in virtual office hours. The method of the virtual office hour should be made clear to students in the syllabus and course information.

- **Disaster Preparation:** All courses (face-to-face, hybrid or fully online) at Lamar State College Orange should be prepared for a natural disaster. All faculty members are expected to use the LMS in the event of a disaster. LSCO plans to continue courses uninterrupted in an online learning environment to continue to maintain student engagement and continue on-track with course work. In the event that Lamar State College Orange's campus cannot operate or the local area is evacuated, the Blackboard LMS provides a stable learning environment to maintain classes during an emergency. Students should be provided this information in the course syllabus as well as reminded during the first meetings of all courses.
- **Archived Gradebooks:** All faculty teaching at Lamar State College Orange will archive final gradebooks at the end of each semester. Faculty will export gradebooks from Blackboard to a local computer using an XTMl file format. Faculty will submit gradebooks to the appropriate Division Director/Dean for the subject area.
- **Online Teaching Certification:** Faculty wanting to teach hybrid/fully distance education courses must complete the Distance Education Faculty Training and receive an online teaching certification. If a faculty member has received credit from another institution or organization for distance education, the faculty member is responsible for providing the appropriate documentation to the Director of Learning Technology for approval from the Distance Education Committee. With the creation of a new online teaching certification program, all faculty teaching hybrid/ fully online classes will need to have completed Online Teaching Certification by the completion of spring 2018.
- **Distance Education Documents:** All documents pertaining to distance education will be housed on Blackboard under the distance education link.

Distance Education Faculty Training

All levels of training have face-to-face and online Blackboard components. The face-to-face training is an hour and the skills usage is another hour of online performance by the faculty member. Faculty training will be presented by the office of Learning Technology. The office will offer trainings a couple times a semester for faculty. Trainings will be announced at the beginning of each semester.

Blackboard Level One Training: Fundamentals	
Part One: Face-to-face (1 hour)	LSCO Template Review, Email, Announcements, Adding Content, Discussion Board, Groups
Part Two: Online (1 hour)	Instructional Design theory for distance education, applying skills from part one face-to-face training
Blackboard Level Two Training: Core Training	
Part One: Face-to-face (1 hour)	Gradebook, Assessments, Rubrics, Tests, Surveys and Pools
Part Two: Online (1 hour)	Best practices for online assessments, applying skills from part two face-to-face training
Blackboard Level Three Training: Expert	
Part One: Face-to-face (1 hour)	Collaborate, Packages and Utilities, and Incorporating Multimedia
Part Two: Online (1 hour)	Understanding the pedagogical advantages for synchronous learning and multimedia

- Technology Upgrade Training: Continuous training is required annually for any new additions to the LMS/ new tools used by LSCO. Faculty will be provided dates for training opportunities.
- Annual Training Requirement: Faculty members who have completed the Blackboard Certification Training are required to have annual professional development every year following their initial Blackboard Certification Training. There is a two-hour minimum for distance education instructor's annual training requirement. These two hours need to be specifically related to distance education. These two hours of professional development can be obtained at on-campus training events, webinars, conferences and other trainings approved by the faculty member's Division Director/ Dean. Annual professional development will be collected by The Director of Learning Technology from the Division Directors/Dean at the end of each spring semester. Faculty who fail to maintain the annual professional development standard will not be allowed to teach distance education courses until the training is complete.

Evaluations: Distance Education Approval/ Mid-Semester Evaluation

- During the first year of a new distance education course, new courses will be subject to a mid-semester review.
- All other courses will be put on a mid-semester course review rotation.
- Courses will be reviewed annually by the Director of Learning Technology to maintain template and course integrity. In addition, Division Directors and Deans will monitor courses to maintain the standard of quality stipulated by the distance education committee's guidelines.
- Courses will be put on a rotation and reviewed every two years by the Distance Education Committee. The DEC will create a rotation and begin review by January 2018.
- Once a course is developed and approved by the DEC, the course design cannot have any significant change until the two-year course review. Course content specific to subject information can be altered with approval from the division director/ dean, but the overall design and assessment methods cannot be altered without the DEC's review.

If a course does not meet standards during mid-semester evaluation or two-year review, the Director of Learning Technology will put a plan in place to immediately improve the course. The DEC will be informed of courses that are not meeting standards and will assist in creating a plan of action.

Blackboard and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Blackboard is in compliance with Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act guidelines. Blackboard provides a text equivalent for every non-text element which allows screen readers and users to interact with the software. Blackboard documents are organized so they are readable without requiring an associated style sheet, and the frames of Blackboard are titled with text that facilitates frame identification and navigation. Blackboard also continues to research and evaluate the current software and will release patches or upgrades as needed to comply.

In addition, the LSCO Distance Education Committee will continue to research and implement best practices to accommodate students and maintain ADA compliance. Faculty will be provided with training opportunities to learn more regarding ADA compliance. Under the leadership of the Director of Learning Technology, the DEC will be working to meet all ADA compliance areas starting with Phase One in spring 2018. The goal is for LSCO to be fully ADA compliant by Fall 2018. Since technology constantly evolves, so will ADA needs. The DEC and Director of Learning Technology will continue to address ADA issues and work to review guidelines put in place. Division Directors, Deans and the Director of Learning Technology will continue to monitor all classes to ensure ADA compliance.

Copyright Law and Blackboard

It is important to LSCO that faculty understand copyright law and Blackboard. Blackboard does not exempt a faculty member from his or her responsibilities to adhere to copyright law because it is a password-protected program.

Faculty should observe the following guidelines:

1. Only post materials on the LMS for a non-profit, educational use.
2. Include proper attributions and citations for all posted materials.
3. Access to the LMS course materials should be limited to faculty and students enrolled in a particular course, and students should not have access to the course materials once the course is completed.
4. Web content should be directly linked rather than copied in Blackboard.
5. Carefully consider whether materials can be used under fair use. According to Rich Stim of Stanford University,

“The four factors judges consider are:

- the purpose and character of your use
- the nature of the copyrighted work
- the amount and substantiality of the portion taken, and
- the effect of the use upon the potential market” (“Measuring Fair Use: The Four Factors”).

6. Be careful! If in doubt, ask permission from the copyright holder.
7. Faculty are encouraged to use E-Reserves and work with the library to protect copyright issues.

LSCO Distance Education Best Practices Recommendations

1. Keep Course Menu and Design Simple and Consistent
2. Create a Read Me First Document
3. Create a Welcome Video
4. Provide Clear Links to Blackboard Student Help and Orientation
5. Create an Inviting and Supportive Course Environment
6. Promote an Active Learning Environment
7. Model Effective Online Interaction
8. Sustain Students’ Motivation
9. Be Present in the Course
10. Compose Clear Guidelines and Policies
11. Create reasonable time on task deadlines
12. Provide clear learning objectives tied to measurable assessments.

References

“Distance Education Policies, Procedures, and Forms.” *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. 2017. Web. 19 Dec. 2017.

“SACSCOC: Distance and Correspondence Education.” *SACSCOC*. SACSCOC. Web. 19 Dec. 2017.

“The Core Rules of Netiquette.” *Netiquette*. Albion.com, 1990-2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2017.