



Distance Learning Guidelines

Introduction

Florida Gateway College strives to offer the highest quality educational learning experience to all of its students, whether it is in a traditional classroom setting or as a distance education setting.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) defines distance education as 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. 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 conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.

Mission

The purpose of offering courses via distance education is to provide greater accessibility to and flexibility in quality educational opportunities that meet the needs of on-demand and lifelong learning to as many people as possible. The mission of distance education at Florida Gateway College is to provide quality education and lifelong learning opportunities to students who cannot or for various reasons choose not to enroll in the on-campus course offerings. The mission of Florida Gateway College is to provide superior instruction, nurture individual development, and enrich the community through quality higher education programs and lifelong learning opportunities. Distance education enhances and supports the mission of the college by delivering a comprehensive selection of quality higher education courses. Students who cannot or for various reasons choose not to enroll in a traditional course can achieve their academic goals by taking distance education courses.

Curriculum and Instruction

All distance education courses undergo the same academic review as other courses. There shall be no distinction in quality or standards of excellence between courses offered through distance education and those offered on campus. Distance education courses provide students quality and effective support services including advising, financial aid, library resources, registrar and admissions.

Faculty Responsibility

FGC places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty. The qualifications of faculty teaching courses through distance education are no different than qualifications of faculty teaching traditional courses. Faculty members have a key role in the development of new programs and courses and curriculum changes to existing courses and programs. Final approval for substantive curriculum changes rests with FGC's Educational Affairs Committee (EAC). The EAC is composed of administrators, faculty and staff. Faculty submit recommendations to the appropriate academic vice president to be addressed by EAC.

The academic vice presidents have administrative oversight to ensure the quality of all distance learning course offerings. All courses are evaluated annually using a peer review rubric and a student faculty evaluation instrument. The peer review rubric contains acceptable standards for distance education courses. The student faculty evaluation instrument evaluates the faculty member on performance.

Technology

The college is constantly updating technology and ensures that all distance education courses contain the most up-to-date hardware and software. The college is focusing attention on providing online students a synchronous learning experience while preserving, for the student, the ability to participate whenever the time is convenient. Every course contains a Frequently Asked Questions document that all students can access. There are also on-demand videos and web links to assist students with the use of the learning management system. There is a link that allows students to determine technical requirements to have in order to take an online course. All courses have been equipped with Collaborate, which provides synchronous learning to all online students.

Students may visit the Distance Learning webpage, to access Frequently Asked Questions, on-demand videos and web links to assist with online learning and Blackboard. The college makes every effort to ensure that adequate resources and support are available.

Intellectual Property

FGC's Board of Trustees Policy 6Hx12:4-14, Intellectual Property, applies to all students, faculty and staff. Rights to copyrightable materials including books, articles, works of art, musical compositions, course materials, blogs and podcasts, reside with the creator if those works are the result of independent effort, with only incidental use of college resources. College assisted work or work completed as part of a college assignment, shall result in shared ownership of the material produced, to be determined by the specific terms and conditions of a written agreement, in the form of a contract.

Academic work completed by students shall be the intellectual property of the student unless otherwise determined by written agreement with the College. This is outlined in the Student Handbook.

The college recognizes and conforms to all existing copyright laws, governing materials and created works in all formats. The college expects all staff, faculty, and students to adhere to these laws.

Academic Support Services

FGC provides appropriate academic support services for all students regardless of course delivery method. Academic support services include Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar, Advising & Student Development, Disability Services, Student Activities, Test Center and Collegewide Learning Lab. Distance education students shall have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support their learning.

All student support departments are featured on the FGC college website and are accessible on-campus, through email, and on the phone. The institution recognizes that appropriate services should be available for online students and off-campus students who may not have the option to travel to the main campus. The college provides an overview of the student support programs as well as information regarding enrollment and student success through an online orientation, which is located on the college's website.

Program Length

FGC affirms that the length of each educational program for which academic credits are awarded is appropriate. The same number of semester credit hours is required for distance education courses as all others.

The Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) is responsible for overseeing curriculum development and review, including ensuring that academic standards and degree and certificate requirements meet the requirements of the FLDOE. Specific program lengths and other detailed information are available on the college website and in the college catalog.

Coherent Course of Study

FGC's degree programs embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with the institution's mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. All distance education courses follow a coherent course of study and are compatible with the mission of the college.

Amount and Level of Credit Awarded

FGC employs sound and acceptable practice for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses offered at the institution, regardless of format or mode of delivery. The amount and level of credit is determined through the same process for all delivery methods. Course specific outcomes ensure that students receive the same information in each course regardless of delivery method. The Academic & Instructional Services section of the college catalog outlines the credit policies.

FGC's District Board of Trustee Policy, Postsecondary Credit Definition, 6Hx12:4-17, defines credit hours awarded for courses and programs are based on State Board of Education Rule, 6A-10.033. This rule defines all types of credit, including college workforce, preparatory, and non-credit. It establishes that one college credit is based on fifteen (15) fifty minute periods of classroom instruction. FGC follows this rule and adheres to the guidelines provided in Florida Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS) as to specific amount of credit that can be awarded for a course. The SCNS is a database, maintained by the state of Florida, of all post-secondary courses at community colleges, universities, public technical centers, and participating approved private institutions.

Appropriate course credits for occupational courses are verified by referencing the State of Florida's Curriculum Frameworks, which establishes required clock hours for all programs as mandated by the Florida Department of Education. Credit hour equivalents are determined in accordance with Rule 6A-10.033.

Consortial Arrangements/Contractual Agreements

FGC ensures the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortia relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the consortia relationship and/or agreement against the purpose of the institution. The college currently has agreements with Santa Fe College, Biotechnology and Respiratory Technology and with St. Petersburg College, Veterinary Technology.

The college maintains agreements with both educational and non-educational organizations. These agreements outline the need and goals to be achieved. Agreements with educational organizations include Career Pathways contractual agreements with local high schools, and articulation agreements with other colleges. Contractual agreements take place between the college and businesses that provide specialized training and clinical and workplace training opportunities for students.

Faculty

Sufficient Number of Qualified Faculty

Qualifications of faculty teaching courses through distance learning at Florida Gateway College are no different than qualifications of faculty teaching traditional courses. Faculty are assigned distance learning courses based on their interest and qualifications. Employing qualified faculty is essential to achieving the college's mission to provide superior instruction, nurture individual development, and enrich the community through quality higher education programs and lifelong learning opportunities. Faculty are hired in accordance with the acceptable credentials for college faculty members as outlined in the SACSCOC Credential Guidelines and FGC Board Policy 6Hx12:7-02. To further ensure that faculty are competent and qualified, a Faculty Member

Credentialing Form listing the faculty teaching credentials and citing the disciplines and courses they are qualified to teach is prepared by the academic Vice President.

The number of faculty members is adequate to support distance learning students. The faculty load sheet provides the number of credit and contact hours and enrollment in each class. As enrollment in course sections grows to a sufficient number to support the hiring of a new faculty member the academic Vice Presidents make a recommendation. The academic Vice Presidents have administrative oversight to ensure the quality of all distance learning course offerings.

Clear Criteria for the Evaluation of Faculty

FGC regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member regardless of mode of delivery. The college has a firm commitment to performance evaluation of all faculty. The evaluation provides comprehensive feedback on the instructor's efforts to improve and accurately assess student learning. Evaluation is also used to ensure teaching and learning goals support the college's mission and goals. The comprehensive feedback is provided by students and the appropriate academic Vice President. Adjunct distance education faculty are also evaluated on course overview and instruction, learning objectives, assessment and measurement, resources and materials, learner interaction and course technology by observing the online course environment and using the Peer Review Rubric.

Faculty members are evaluated once a year by the appropriate academic Vice President. The evaluation places a focus on teaching efforts to improve student learning. The faculty evaluation process alternates each year between a formal evaluation meeting with the supervisor and the development of a Learning Enhancement Plan (LEAP). The LEAP is a research-based project designed to enhance student learning through a specific strategy, technique, or modification in current teaching practices. The results will be used to make modifications to teaching strategies to improve student learning outcomes. The LEAP will be evaluated regularly by the faculty member and annually by the immediate supervisor.

Faculty Receive Appropriate Training

Florida Gateway College ensures that instructors who teach online courses receive appropriate training. Workshops are provided each semester on Blackboard and various other topics. Faculty acquire one on one assistance on various topics from the Distance Learning Coordinator. The college supports travel for faculty to workshops and meetings.

Faculty also have access to the On-Demand Learning Center for Blackboard. Included in the On-Demand Learning Center are step-by step tutorials on Blackboard. There is a link for Ask Dr. C, which is a free question and answer service moderated by peers.

Institutional Effectiveness

Evaluation of Distance Education

All courses at the college go through an annual student evaluation process. Instructor success rates are also provided at the end of each term.

Distance Education is part of the systematic program review process. The review examines the overview, collaboration with other departments and programs, resources, accomplishments, learning outcomes, student performance, goals and an action plan.

The college uses assessment tools to evaluate the effectiveness of its distance learning education. A rubric is used as part of a peer review for online courses. It examines course overview, learning objectives, assessment and measurement, resources and materials, learner interaction and course technology.

Library and Learning Resources

Access to and Use of Library Resources

Online students and faculty do not have access to a physical library facility, but the college makes every effort to ensure these students and faculty have access to the full range of library services. The Library provides access to its collection and is available from any computer with Internet access. The book and magazine databases are available both on and off campus. These databases are available on the Library's home page, in each course in Blackboard and can easily be accessed by students, faculty and staff. All students, faculty and staff can access the Library Orientation from the college website.

The library's extended hours of operation ensure that both campus and distance learning users have access to the main library. The main library is open from 7:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday and from 7:30-4:30 on Friday. The members of the library staff are available by phone or email to assist all students, faculty and staff.

All students, faculty and staff have access to ASK a Librarian. This provides Florida residents with virtual reference services through live chat and text messaging from 10 a.m. to midnight Sunday through Thursday (ET), and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday (ET). Email is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service allows anyone to ask questions and get answers from live reference staff from across the state.

The Library is part of the systematic comprehensive program review process. The review examines the overview, collaboration with other departments and programs, resources, accomplishments, learning outcomes, student performance, goals and an action plan.

Access to Laboratories and Equipment

Students and faculty have access to computer labs, learning labs and equipment appropriate to the courses. The college makes every effort to ensure that adequate resources and support are available.

Students can check their computer settings by selecting a link in Blackboard. The link will check the student's browser, Java, cookies, popups and plug-ins.

Student Services

Student support services are available to all students on campus or through the college website. The college makes every effort to ensure that the services are appropriate to support the courses offered through distance education.

Student Complaint Procedures

Students who are enrolled in online courses have the same rights and must adhere to the same policy as students who are enrolled in traditional courses. All students have access to the electronic student handbook, which can be accessed through the college website. The handbook outlines procedures for student complaints. Students can also access grievance procedures through Blackboard. To date, the college has not had an instance of an online student filing a formal complaint.

Advertising, Recruiting, and Admissions Information

Advertising, recruiting and admissions information is not separate for distance learning courses. Students who wish to enroll in a distance learning course must follow the same admission procedures as students who are enrolled in traditional courses.

Accurate information about programs, requirements and services are available on the college website. Students can access the information through the college catalog, student handbook and various links throughout the website.

Security Measures

The college validates that the same student who registers for online classes is the student who completes the coursework. The student is assigned a unique username and password, which is used to access online courses through Blackboard. The student has the ability to change the password at any time, if necessary. Students are also assigned a unique college email account with a unique username and password. The faculty and students use this email account as the primary means to communicate in an online course. The college communicates a lot of information about various topics through the student email account.

Distance learning adheres to the same security measures as traditional courses. Distance learning courses also adhere to the same plagiarism measures as traditional courses.

Use of Technology, Necessary Equipment and Assistance

Students enrolled in distance education courses are provided links for help with the use of Blackboard and technology. The Distance Learning Coordinator assists students with their online courses, technology and various other issues that students have questions or problems with. Faculty members have the capability to use Collaborate, which gives the students a synchronous method to communicate with the faculty member and other students. The Technology Department also assists students in the use of technology.

Facilities and Finances

The college has appropriate equipment and technical expertise required for distance education. The technological resources, means of delivery, and other physical resources are available, maintained, staffed, and upgraded on a regular basis.

The college provides adequate funding for faculty, staff, services and technological infrastructure to support the methodology. Funds for maintaining distance education courses are reviewed as part of the planning and budgeting process. The college charges an additional fee for all online courses, which helps to provide funding. The college is committed to providing resources and support for distance learning education.