

Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) (2011)

1. Online learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes.

*Analysis/Evidence:*¹

- The mission statement explains the role of online learning within the range of the institution's programs and services;
- Institutional and program statements of vision and values inform how the online learning environment is created and supported;
- As appropriate, the institution incorporates into its online learning programs methods of meeting the stated institutional goals for the student experience at the institution;
- The recruitment and admissions programs supporting the online learning courses and programs appropriately target the student populations to be served;
- The students enrolled in the institution's online learning courses and programs fit the admissions requirements for the students the institution intends to serve;
- Senior administrators and staff can articulate how online learning is consonant with the institution's mission and goals.

2. The institution's plans for developing, sustaining, and, if appropriate, expanding online learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.

Analysis/Evidence:

- Development and ownership of plans for online learning extend beyond the administrators directly responsible for it and the programs directly using it;
- Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase numbers of programs provided through online learning courses and programs and/or numbers of students to be enrolled in them;
- Plans for online learning are linked effectively to budget and technology planning to ensure adequate support for current and future offerings;
- Plans for expanding online learning demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality;
- The institution and its online learning programs have a track record of conducting needs analysis and of supporting programs.

3. Online learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance and academic oversight.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The institution's faculty have a designated role in the design and implementation of its online learning offerings;
- The institution ensures the rigor of the offerings and the quality of the instruction;
- Approval of online courses and programs follows standard processes used in the college or university;
- Online learning courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis;
- Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the institution can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all online learning offerings provided under its name.

¹ These bulleted points illustrate actions, processes and facts that institutions may use to demonstrate that they meet SARA requirements.

4. Curricula for the institution's online learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The curricular goals and course objectives show that the institution or program has knowledge of the best uses of online learning in different disciplines and settings;
- Curricula delivered through online learning are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs, if provided by the institution, or those provided by traditional institutions;
- The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses and is effectively defined in easily available documents including course syllabi and program descriptions;
- Scheduling of online learning courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees;
- The institution or program has established and enforces a policy on online learning course enrollments to ensure faculty capacity to work appropriately with students;
- Expectations for any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work) are stated clearly;
- Course design and delivery supports student-student and faculty-student interaction;
- Curriculum design and the course management system enable active faculty contribution to the learning environment;
- Course and program structures provide schedule and support known to be effective in helping online learning students persist and succeed.

5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its online learning offerings, including the extent to which the online learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.

Analysis/Evidence:

- Assessment of student learning follows processes used in onsite courses or programs and/or reflects good practice in assessment methods;
- Student course evaluations are routinely taken and an analysis of them contributes to strategies for course improvements;
- Evaluation strategies ensure effective communication between faculty members who design curriculum, faculty members who interact with students, and faculty members who evaluate student learning;
- The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in online courses and uses the results for improvement;
- The institution demonstrates the appropriate use of technology to support its assessment strategies;
- The institution documents its successes in implementing changes informed by its programs of assessment and evaluation;
- The institution provides examples of student work and student interactions among themselves and with faculty;
- The institution sets appropriate goals for the retention/persistence of students using online learning, assesses its achievement of these goals, and uses the results for improvement.

6. Faculty responsible for delivering the online learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the online learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.

Analysis/Evidence:

- Online learning faculties are carefully selected, appropriately trained, frequently evaluated, and are marked by an acceptable level of turnover;
- The institution's training program for online learning faculty is periodic, incorporates tested good practices in online learning pedagogy, and ensures competency with the range of software products used by the institution;
- Faculty are proficient and effectively supported in using the course management system;

- The office or persons responsible for online learning training programs are clearly identified and have the competencies to accomplish the tasks, including knowledge of the specialized resources and technical support available to support course development and delivery;
- Faculty members engaged in online learning share in the mission and goals of the institution and its programs and are provided the opportunities to contribute to the broader activities of the institution;
- Students express satisfaction with the quality of the instruction provided by online learning faculty members.

7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The institution's admissions program for online learning provides good web-based information to students about the nature of the online learning environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in online learning;
- The institution provides an online learning orientation program;
- The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the online learning program;
- Students in online learning programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, course registration, and career and placement counseling;
- Students in online learning programs have ready access to 24/7 tech support;
- Students using online learning have adequate access to learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories, and equipment and tracking systems;
- Students using online learning demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources;
- Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically;
- Publications and advertising for online learning programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty;
- Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution's system of student authentication.

8. The institution provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its online learning offerings.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The institution prepares a multi-year budget for online learning that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, and technology infrastructure;
- The institution provides evidence of a multi-year technology plan that addresses its goals for online learning and includes provision for a robust and scalable technical infrastructure.

9. The institution assures the integrity of its online offerings.

Analysis/Evidence:

- The institution has in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The institution makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. (Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programs must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.);
- The institution's policies on academic integrity include explicit references to online learning;
- Issues of academic integrity are discussed during the orientation for online students;
- Training for faculty members engaged in online learning includes consideration of issues of academic integrity, including ways to reduce cheating.

To: Dr. Richard Leeman, Faculty President

From: Dr. Gregory Mixon, Chair, Faculty Academic Policy and Standards Committee

Date: February 26, 2018

Re: UNC Charlotte Academic Policy: Evaluation of Distance Education & Online Offerings

FAPSC met today with FESC to discuss the FAPSC proposal for Online and Distance Education. FAPSC has approved the attached proposal developed by Dr. Susan Lynch, FAPSC member. The broad outlines of the proposal conform-with C-RAC guidelines. FESC will forward to Faculty Executive Council a separate proposal recommending there be University-wide standards and committees be-put in place to manage Distance Education and Online offerings. FAPSC supports FESC's recommendations while seeking to provide the broadest latitude for each individual college to shape their own Online policies.

Attached please find the Distance Education and Online Offerings proposal approved by FAPSC at its February 26, 2018, meeting:

Faculty Academic Policy and Standards, Proposed Policy on Evaluation of Distance Education and Online Offerings

UNC Charlotte Academic Policy: Evaluation of Distance Education & Online Offerings

I. Introduction

Online learning is an integral part of instructional pedagogy faculty may use to deliver academic course offerings and programs. As such, continuous evaluation processes of online offerings are in place to ensure the institution meets best practice standards in online learning. UNC Charlotte is a member institution of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). This agreement is overseen by a national council and administered by its four regional education compacts.

II. Policy Statement

PURPOSE

The purpose of distance education and online offering evaluation policy at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte shall be to ensure that the institution and faculty support the delivery of high quality online education according to the standards set forth by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commission.

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

1. Online learning is integrated into the institution's mission, vision, and planning processes. Each academic college will articulate processes surrounding online learning and its development, implementation, and evaluation in academic planning for their respective departments. (#1 & 2 C-RAC) The institution will provide sufficient resources to support both the financial and technological needs of its programs (C-RAC #8). In addition, the institution will ensure the integrity of its online offerings. Policies related to secure student registration and enrollment as indicated in the Distance Education and Correspondence Education Policy statement and academic integrity as stated in University Policy 407 are in place (#9 C-RAC).
 2. Online learning and respective course offerings will involve faculty and follow the standard processes for curriculum approval according to each academic college and University standards. (#3 C-RAC)
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3. Curricula for online offerings are comparable in rigor to traditional instructional formats. Each academic college will demonstrate a plan that ensures online best practices for the specific discipline in relation to online learning. This includes benchmarking to traditional courses if offered, pathway to timely graduation, policy on course enrollments, expectations of student work, course design, course objectives, and supportive learning environment for student to student and student to faculty interaction (#4 C-RAC)

4. Each academic college will develop a process for the evaluation of its online offerings and the support services provided and demonstrates its use of the results of the evaluation for improvement. Inclusion of the following is required: assessment of student learning and improvement plan, online course and/or program evaluation including examples of student work and student & faculty interaction, student evaluations, support services, use of appropriate technology, and retention efforts. Student services for online offerings are supported by the University and specific distance education programs are supported by the Extended Academic Programs and its processes are clearly defined (#5 & 7 C-RAC)

5. Each academic college will identify the selection and training processes for faculty responsible for delivering online offerings to ensure faculty are educationally and/or experientially qualified to deliver online offerings to ensure academic rigor. Faculty may use multiple pathways from internal and external reputable sources for education in online course design and teaching and learning. The Center of Teaching Learning is one resource to assist in the training and support of faculty regarding best practices, online course design, and the learning management system (#6 C-RAC).

III. Definitions

Distance education occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Distance education may be mediated through use of the Internet (online) or other means.

Off-campus program delivery occurs when students and instructors are together at an instructional site that is geographically separate from the main campus of the institution (UNC System, UNC Regulation 400.1).

Extended academic programs at UNC Charlotte supports those programs approved as a distance education programs approved through UNC-GA.

Online offerings are defined as any course or program in which course objectives are achieved through online delivery of course content.

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is an agreement among member states, districts, and territories in the United States, which establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs.

IV. Policy/Procedure Contact(s)

V. History

- **Approved:**

VI. Related Policies, Procedures and Resources

- Code of Student Academic Integrity: University Policy 407
- Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement

DRAFT

Report from the Faculty Employment Status Committee, Online course offerings

FESC on Online Classes

FESC met three times on this issue last term, including a meeting with representatives from CTL. We generated two documents, one of which was forwarded to FAPSC since we believed it had implications for its work.

FESC reached the following conclusions:

1. FESC believes that the rearticulation of the C-RAC guidelines should be done at the university level, and should define not just aspirations and directives, but a university wide process as well as a locus for their implementation.
2. We believe that there are three distinguishable aspects to the issue:
 - o Who teaches online classes?
 - o What is required in an online class?
 - o How is an online class evaluated?
3. Who : We recommend a minimum amount of training for professors seeking to teach online classes. This could take the form of attending workshops offered at CLT at a regular pace. The analog in current practice is the criterion that faculty teaching graduate level classes be "on" the graduate faculty. This expectation is part of the draft policy issued by FAPSC. We find this a sufficient representation of our position.
4. What: We recommend the creation of an Online Course and Curriculum Committee (OCCC) to examine and approve proposed classes for online delivery. The analog in current practice is the required approval by UCOL of courses designed to fulfil gen ed goals.
5. How : A separate instrument for student evals for online classes needs to be drawn up. Many of the questions may be identical to existing ones used now for student evals, but a new bank of questions that get to the particular aspects of online delivery is needed. FESC has drawn up these questions. We believe this will fit in with FAPSC work and will be included in its policy recommendation.

Paths to New Online Classes

1. Create optional "OL" (= Online Line) designation available for new classes
 1. Analogous to W/O/ etc. designation
 2. OL means cleared for 100% online delivery
2. "OL" can be earned in two ways
 1. Via QM (Quality Matters) certification
 2. Via self-design
3. Via QM
 1. Faculty preparing the class goes through QM certification with CTL
 2. OL designation is automatic with QM certification
 3. Once thus certified, the proposal returns to the normal curriculum process : CCCC to FCCC, etc.
4. Via self-design

1. Faculty submits course for inspection by new university OCCC (Online Course and Curriculum Committee) during the proposal process
 2. Analogous to submission to UCOL curriculum committee for O/W etc.
 3. OCCC provides faculty with checklist of desiderata consistent with C-RAC requirements
 4. If/when approved, the proposal follows the regular curriculum process : CCCC to FCCC, etc.
5. Qualification of Online Instructors
1. Each college and department certifies and documents that online instructors are appropriately qualified to teach online as per their own method and criteria consistent with C-RAC guidelines
 2. Each college and department certifies and documents that online instructors receive ongoing training in online course design and implementation
6. Evaluation of Online Class
1. 100% online classes use new online student evals
 2. New student evals designed in accordance with OCCC/C-RAC desiderata

Aestimanda

- What to do about existing 100% online classes.
- How to provide instructions to colleges and departments about qualification of online instructors.
- What to do about hybrid/blended classes?
- Creating an OCCC.
- Drafting the OCCC requirements for new classes.
- Drafting the online student evals.