

# Distance Learning Policies & Procedures

## Department of Distance Learning



**August 2019**

## Mission

The mission of the Distance Learning Department is to provide greater access to higher education and to support the effective implementation of emerging technologies by faculty and students in distance or blended learning environments.

### I. Goals:

- Ensure distance or blended-learning students have equitable institutional support and services as those provided to on-campus students.
- Promote knowledge and adoption of evidence-based design practices found to produce quality teaching and learning in distance and blended-learning environments.
- Provide training and support for distance and blended-learning faculty and students related to the implementation and use of emerging technologies.
- Evaluate the quality of distance and blended-learning environments.
- Collaborate with local community and industry leaders to expand and market our institution's distance learning course offerings.

### II. Student Support Services

Distance learning students share the same admissions standards as traditional students and must follow the same process for enrollment at South Arkansas Community College. All prospective distance learning students may apply for admission, register for classes, and pay tuition and fees during registration periods. Students who wish to register for online courses must consult with an advisor by contacting the Office of Enrollment Services at (870) 864-7142. All necessary information related to enrollment, advising, registration, and withdrawing may be found on the SouthArk Admissions website: [<http://www.southark.edu/index.php/home-admissions>].

The following student support services are available for students at a distance:

- Students can fill out an application online and then mail in all the supporting documents, shot records, test scores and other transcripts.
- Once students have been advised, they can either register online via Campus Connect or they can fax or email a signed registration form, and Student Services staff will register them in the office.
- All students can withdraw from classes by sending a signed request to the Office of Enrollment Services, which will secure the necessary signatures.
- Students may access the graduation checklist on the website, and once they have completed it, can fax or email the signed copy to Enrollment Services for processing.

Similarly, distance learning students may apply for financial aid and access other student services, such as tutoring, counseling and the Virtual Career Center, on the Student Services college website, <http://www.southark.edu/index.php/home-student-services>; or may access additional Student Services information and policies via the Online Course Catalog at <http://www.southark.edu/index.php/course-catalog>.

### III. Faculty Support and Development

The Department of Distance Learning shall provide faculty training opportunities to ensure that quality course design principles are implemented in online, hybrid or blended courses. Instructors who teach online, hybrid or blended courses are expected to continually improve their skills related to the institution's learning management system, accept quality assurance practices for course design, and emerging technologies. The Department of Distance Learning shall maintain a

regular faculty training schedule at various skill levels.

SouthArk's Department of Distance Learning provides specific training that is tailored to three categories of educators: Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced.

### **Beginning**

Faculty who do not have formal training in the pedagogy or development/design of either a hybrid (blended) or online course must complete training modules before teaching for the first time. Distance Learning staff have prepared a series of lessons designed to provide an overview of the process of course development and design. Upon successful completion of this instruction, the faculty member submits a fully designed course to the Director of Distance Education who, in consultation with a review team, evaluates the course and recommends it to a supervising dean for use in a schedule. The process may require adaptations/changes the faculty member will need to address prior to final approval and recommendation.

### **Intermediate**

Faculty who have taught using the hybrid or online platforms may wish to enhance their course further. Additionally, this instruction will be useful for faculty who have assessed their course and determined they need to change/update its content. This instruction also lends itself well to faculty who, in consultation with a supervising dean, have identified areas for improvement.

More in-depth instruction about the various benefits of Blackboard as the institutional LMS is explored beyond the beginning level.

### **Advanced**

Faculty who have determined they want to bring more creative and technical elements into their hybrid/online course may benefit from this instruction. More advanced tools of the LMS are emphasized for increased communication and interaction with students.

### **Beginning:**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Content Description</b>
<b>Announcements</b>	Learn how to create, reorder, edit and delete announcements.
<b>Grade Center</b>	Become familiar with setting up the Grade Center, creating and managing grade columns, entering grades.
<b>Course Menu Add-Delete</b>	The Course Menu: How to Re-Arrange, Add and Delete Items

<b>Content</b>	<b>Content Description</b>
<b>Tool Availability</b>	Discover which tools are available in your course and which users have access to them.
<b>Assignments</b>	Learn how to create and edit an assignment, including descriptions, point value, and attaching files.
<b>Check My Browser</b>	Understand the importance of checking your browser.

<b>Global Navigation and Quick Links</b>	Learn how to Access the Global Navigation Menu and My Blackboard.
<b>Rearranging Course List</b>	View tips on how to re-arrange course listing in Blackboard.
<b>Tests</b>	Learn how to create a test, including how to add new questions and reorder them.
<b>Course Roles and Enrolling Users</b>	A review of Course Roles and Enrollment
<b>Blackboard Retention Center</b>	Learn how instructors track student progress and performance in courses throughout the semester.
<b>Student Support Services</b>	Become familiar with the Student Support services listed here.
<b>Universal Design and Accessibility for Online Learning*</b>	This course is an introduction to building online courses that are usable and accessible. The content is intended to inspire further exploration and advocacy for designing materials that benefit all students.
<b>Campus Technology</b>	This course provides an opportunity to practice using tools related to our institution's learning management system and other campus technologies essential for student success in technology-rich courses.

**Intermediate:**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Content Description</b>
<b>Rubrics</b>	This is a brief overview of the usefulness of rubrics, rubric components and how to use the Blackboard Rubric tool.
<b>Instructor Record/Downloading Artifacts</b>	This is a review on how to review grade book history, download data such as assignments from the grade center, and run grade book reports.
<b>Quality Matters</b>	These resources will familiarize you with Quality Matters (QM) professional development training and the QM rubric.
<b>Tools for Communicating with Distance Students</b>	A review of free tools to help online instructors communicate more easily with distance students.
<b>Calendar</b>	Instruction given on how to set up the Blackboard Course Calendar on Outlook
<b>Content</b>	<b>Content Description</b>
<b>Universal Design*</b>	This module provides an introduction to the principles of universal design and how you can apply them to online learning environments.
<b>Item Analysis</b>	Here is an overview of the item analysis tool in Blackboard.
<b>Learning Styles*</b>	Learn about designing appealing material to engage learners and promote successful outcomes.
<b>Blackboard Collaborate: Getting Started</b>	Learn the introductory skills and knowledge needed to begin facilitating web conferencing sessions using Blackboard Collaborate.
<b>Blackboard Collaborate</b>	Training resources for faculty interested in using Blackboard Collaborate are presented.

## Advanced:

Content	Content Description
<b>Online Video</b>	A review of information chunking, scripting, and recording.
<b>Blackboard Evaluation Reports/Statistics</b>	Learn about the available statistics available in Blackboard.
<b>Accessibility for Online Learning*</b>	This module concentrates on the history of the legislation that opened education and training for people with disabilities.
<b>Insight</b>	An overview on the software that allows instructors to see and control all monitors and computers in the room and allows classroom collaboration among students and instructors.
<b>Blackboard Collaborate: Moderator Access</b>	Learn how to implement your new Moderator Access license including how to create web conferencing sessions and named moderator user accounts.
<b>Blackboard Collaborate</b>	Training resources for faculty interested in using Blackboard Collaborate are presented.
<b>iPad and AirServer</b>	<p>IPad training provides an overview of settings, setting up email and calendars, downloading apps, searching and connecting to Wi-Fi networks, and using AirServer.</p> <p>AirServer is an AirPlay receiver for Mac/PC. It allows you to stream content or Mirror your display from your iOS devices such as an iPad. With AirServer you can wirelessly beam your iPad display to your Mac or PC and from there to your projector, smartboard or HDTV. AirServer also supports multiple simultaneous connections, so one or more students could mirror their iPads to share their ideas and their work with the rest of the class.</p>

## Distance Learning Levels of Achievement

### Beginning

To be considered beginning level distance learning faculty:

- Faculty must complete an online training course facilitated by the Distance Learning Department
- Upon completion of the online training course, the faculty must submit a complete course to the Director of Distance Learning

### Intermediate

To be considered intermediate level distance learning faculty:

- Faculty must attend professional development related to distance learning; e.g., a workshop, webinar, or training session; or,
- Faculty must have demonstrated intermediate distance learning experience as confirmed by a recommendation from the supervising dean and Distance Learning staff

### Advanced

To be considered advanced level distance learning faculty:

- Faculty must participate as a peer reviewer in the course review process; or,
- Faculty must have demonstrated advanced distance learning experience as confirmed by a recommendation from the supervising dean and Distance Learning staff

## Approved Course Menu Structure to Promote a Common Navigation Experience

### a. Home Page

Every course should have the Home Page set as the entry point. The entry point will remain set at the Home Page and contain by default the 'Announcements' and 'Report Card' modules. The instructor may add other modules to the Home Page.

### b. Default Course Menu (in order of appearance)

1. Home Page
2. Start Here
3. Content
4. Announcements
5. Discussions
6. Tools
- 7 Help
8. Grades

Additional links may be added by the instructor below the default course menu.

## Quality Matters and Blackboard Best Practices

Continuous improvement for hybrid/online instruction is ensured through SouthArk's adoption of *Quality Matters* (QM) and Blackboard best practices in all levels of course and faculty hybrid/online pedagogy development.

The following rubric is used when developing a hybrid/online course to ensure the structure meets or exceeds quality.

**Best Practices**  
**Online and Blended or Hybrid**  
**Instructors Department of Distance**  
**Learning**

### Course Design

*QM Standard 1, QM Standard 4, and QM Standard 6, BB Goals and Objectives, Content Presentation, BB Learner Support, BB Course/Institutional Policies & Support*

- ┌ Instructor contains a Start Here module, unit or week with course introductory materials.
  - ┌ Explain course format or structure.
  - ┌ Identify and provide instructions on how to access course tools and technology.
  - ┌ Clearly explain netiquette expectations for all forms of communication in the course.
  - ┌ Provide information regarding relevant institutional policies and student success resources (i.e. technical help-desk, accessibility, plagiarism, cheating, and library).

- ┆ Provides review of required prerequisites for course and technical competencies.
- ┆ Instructor introduction provided to students in course.
- ┆ Course is organized in manageable segments such as by learning modules, units or week.
- ┆ A course calendar is provided with syllabus and denotes recommended dates for completing learning module, unit or weekly activities.
- ┆ Course content is presented in a variety of formats or learning activities.

### **Course Navigation**

*QM Standard 6, BB Content Presentation, BB Technology Use*

- ┆ Course navigation is logical and consistent by module, unit or week.
- ┆ All course links provided (internal/external) are working and functional.
- ┆ Required and supplementary activities or course materials are clearly denoted.
- ┆ Publisher materials and other course content resources are integrated with institution's learning management system to support streamlined navigation.

### **Course Objectives**

*QM Standard 2, BB Goals and Objectives*

- ┆ Overall course objectives and individual course objectives for individual learning units are provided
- ┆ Overall course and individual module, unit or week course objectives align and reflect desired outcomes and are clearly written and measurable.
- ┆ Individual module, unit or week learning objectives are easily visible and accessible within their respective folder.

### **Course communication**

*QM Standard 5, BB Learner Engagement, BB Communication Strategies, BB Interaction Logistics, BB Instructor Role and Information*

- ┆ Instructor has provided a variety of communication strategies and opportunities for student to student, instructor to student and student to instructor interaction.
- ┆ Instructor has clearly published information regarding online office hours, response times for email, discussion and other forms of communication within the course.
- ┆ Instructor responds to all student inquiries within 24 hours of receipt.
- ┆ Instructor's policy and timeframe for returning graded course activities and assignments clearly written and available within course section.
- ┆ Instructor provides regular course announcements providing reminders and course updates.
- ┆ Course communication activities encourage students to feel part of a learning community.
- ┆ Students are asked to provide an introduction to other students in the course.
- ┆ Instructor maintains online presence by their participation, facilitation or monitoring of student communication within their course.
- ┆ A general discussion thread is available to allow students to communicate and ask questions regarding the course.
- ┆ Course learning activities provide opportunities for student to student interaction and collaboration.

- ┆ Instructor clearly communicates expectations for student interaction and participation in the course.

### **Course Evaluation or Assessment**

*QM Standard 3, QM Standard 4, BB Learner Engagement, BB Assessment*

- ┆ The grading policy is clearly stated on the course syllabus.
- ┆ Assessments align with overall course objectives and/or individual learning objectives/goals.
- ┆ All course activities, assessments and assignments have descriptive instructions, point allocation and descriptive criteria of how students will be graded.
- ┆ Grades are managed and easily made accessible to students through the institution's learning management system.
- ┆ Course assessment provides opportunities for higher order thinking, problem solving and self-assessment.

### **Course Technology**

*QM Standard 4, QM Standard 6, BB Supportive Software*

Required and optional software list provided along with instructions for installation requirements, proper installation and course implementation.

- ┆ Instructor clearly communicates if there is a cost associated with any course technology employed in the course it is clearly communicated to students.

### **File Management**

*BB Technical Accessibility Issues*

- ┆ Videos and large files are available in smaller or manageable chunks to assist in reasonable download times.

### **Accessibility**

*QM Standard 8, BB Accommodations for Disabilities, BB Feedback*

- ┆ Transcripts of videos or audio files are provided.
- ┆ Instructor provides opportunities for students to provide anonymous feedback regarding course design, delivery and navigation (accessibility).
- ┆ Course design keeps in mind appropriate use of color, text size, and provides audio and video controls.

## **IV. New Distance Course Approval Process**

The approval process applies to courses that have never been taught online at South Arkansas Community College and use electronic delivery for 50% or more of the course.

### **A. Planning and Development**

The instructor/course developer plans and develops the online course modules in a shell within the SouthArk course management system, following the standards of exemplary online courses adopted by SouthArk. The instructor/course developer submits a written proposal to teach an

online course to his or her academic dean. The academic dean must approve the proposal before course development proceeds. The proposal should address the following questions and accompany the Curriculum Committee Information Sheet:

1. How does the proposed course fit into current departmental programs and long-range departmental plans for online courses/programs?
2. What is the anticipated enrollment?
3. What potential target populations exist for this course? If the course will target campus-based students, please provide rationale.
4. What percentage of the class will be Internet-based?
5. Beyond the support services provided by SouthArk, are other special resources required? Please explain.
6. Will students be required to come to the campus or other locations to meet any course requirements, including examinations?
7. What are your proposed time frames for course development?
8. What level of course development support do you anticipate needing from the SouthArk Distance Learning Department? Minimal, moderate, extensive? Please explain.
9. What measures will be taken to ensure that the students acquire and can demonstrate course competencies?

#### B. Timeline

1. Any course that is to be placed for the first time on the fall schedule of classes for registration must have submitted the initial proposal to the appropriate academic dean no later than the end of the spring semester.
2. Any course that is to be placed for the first time on the spring schedule of classes for registration must have submitted the initial proposal to the appropriate academic dean no later than the end of the summer term.
3. Any course that is to be placed for the first time on the summer schedule of classes for registration must have submitted the initial proposal to the appropriate academic dean no later than the end of the fall term.
4. Exception to the timeline should be submitted with justification to the dean of the division for approval.

#### C. Review

After the course has been developed by the instructor, the course will go through the following process:

1. The course will go to the Director of Distance Learning who will refer it to the appropriate reviewer(s) and inform the Distance Learning Advisory Committee.
2. The reviewer(s) will submit recommendations to the instructor/course developer for appropriate action and notify the Director of Distance Learning.
3. The Director of Distance Learning will provide general recommendation(s) to the Distance Learning Advisory Committee.
4. The course will go to the Curriculum Committee for approval with a recommendation from the Distance Learning Advisory Committee.
5. The course will go to the Academic Affairs Council for approval.
6. The course will go to the Executive Cabinet for final approval, only if the course being developed has budgetary implications.

## D. Implementation

Following this process, the Director of Distance Learning will notify the academic dean if the course is approved or needs revision.

As the instructor teaches the course, he or she must work to ensure it fully meets the guidelines of SouthArk's designated quality assurance model.

## V. Existing Distance Course Review Process

Each calendar year, the Director of Distance Learning will choose a number of distance learning courses to review roughly equal to 10% of the overall number of distance learning courses offered. In determining which courses to review, the director will take several factors into account, giving higher priority to courses with high enrollment and lower priority to courses that have been recently approved or reviewed.

### A. Composition of Distance Course Review Teams

The review teams will consist of three members:

- The review team leader must be an Academic Dean or the Director of Distance Learning
- One review team member must be from the same division as the course under review
- The remaining member will be a faculty member from any division

The team members will be selected by the review team leader.

### B. Distance Course Review Process

The courses will be reviewed according to the best practices rubric in the Distance Learning Policies and Procedures Manual. In performing the review, the reviewers will be charged with evaluating the content and design of the course--not the instructor's performance or engagement. The instructor's performance in the course will be evaluated by his or her Academic Dean as part of normal instructor evaluation. Each reviewer will independently complete the review, and then the two faculty reviewers will submit their reviews electronically to the review team leader.

### C. Distance Course Review Results

Each reviewer will vote to assign one of three outcomes to the course:

- Met standards: The course has met the standards set forth in the best practices, and can continue to be taught as submitted.
- Conditional: The course met most of the standards set forth in the best practices, but needs some specific modifications. The course can continue to be taught as submitted, but the instructor must submit evidence to the review team leader that the requested modifications have been made.
- Not met: The course has serious concerns with regard to best practices. The course cannot be offered again in its current form until the instructor submits evidence to the review team leader that the requested modifications have been made.

The outcome of the review will be presented to the affected instructor(s) by the review team leader. The team leader will inform the instructor(s) of any necessary modifications to the course, as well as a timeline for submitting those modifications. The team leader will report the results of the course review to the Director of Distance Learning.

## VI. Faculty Compensation and Work Load

- A. All SouthArk faculty members are encouraged to integrate innovative uses of technology into their classes that support the highest quality learning experiences for SouthArk students.
- B. Development of an online course will be factored into the instructor's teaching load as a regular course or in a method yet to be determined.
- C. If the online course is taught as an overload by a full-time faculty member or an adjunct, faculty will receive the standard overload adjunct course salary.
- D. The maximum course enrollment before overload is 30 students.
- E. SouthArk's instructional administration will review issues with online faculty course loads on a case-by-case basis.
- F. Online or hybrid courses that have been deemed exemplary or of high quality through an external review process will receive faculty recognition.

## VII. Standard Components of the Electronic Syllabus

Instructors are required to follow the syllabus guidelines as outlined in Section 3.06 of the APM as well as items listed below. Any additional information may be added as the instructor sees fit.

- A. Course Date:** Instructors should clearly indicate if the course dates do not follow all official college calendar dates and deadlines.
- B. Course Content:** Instructors should give an outline of the content that will be included in the course.
- C. Required Text and Other Required Materials:** Instructors will also need to inform students on the expectations to obtain the text and other materials.
- D. Course Calendar:** Instructors should give students a course calendar which offers deadlines and dates of all required course activities and assessments. Also, instructors should indicate any scheduled face-to-face meetings for exams, field trips, and other needs. Students should be informed of penalties that will be enforced on any assignments that are submitted late. For example, "Your grade on any assignment will be reduced 5% for each day it is submitted late." Professors/instructors should make every effort to adhere to the assigned dates.
- E. Grading Policies:**
  - a. Notify students of all required or graded course activities for each individual module, unit or week.
  - b. Provide clear expectations or performance criteria for each assignment through rubrics or other appropriate grading tools.
  - c. Clearly indicate the weight of each activity as related to the final grade.
  - d. Explain how final grades are computed within the course.
  - e. Explain where and how students receive their course grades.
  - f. Post policies for missed tests, late assignments, etc.
  - g. Inform students if they may submit required coursework prior to assigned due dates.
- F. Attendance:** Instructors should share with students that active participation in an online course constitutes attendance.
- G. Instructor Information:** Instructors should list their name, title, department etc. and the recommended ways to receive student contact: e.g. email, phone, and FAX numbers.
- H. Contact Policy:** Instructors should share with students their online schedule, including when they will respond to email and /or conference comments. Within this section, they should inform students of the anticipated response time for email. An example is provided below.
- I. Online Office Hours Policy:** Instructors will be expected to hold regular office hours for their online courses as described in the Administrative Procedures Manual. To accommodate online students who are unable to come to campus to attend office hours, instructors may employ alternative communication methods during office hours such online web conferencing tools available via our learning management system.

## VIII. Proctoring of Tests

To maintain the integrity of the course and to prevent cheating, some online instructors may require students to take tests in a proctored environment. Students who live near El Dorado will be expected to take their tests in the Learning Center, where they will need to show a photo ID to receive their test materials and sign a form in which they state that they understand, and will abide by the testing policies. Students enrolled in online courses requiring proctored exams must make arrangements at the beginning of the semester with their instructors for off-campus testing.

A student who does not live close to campus and desires to test elsewhere must notify the instructor no later than two weeks after the first official class day so the instructor will have time to arrange for a proctored testing site near the student's home or in order to make alternative proctoring arrangements. The student will need to show their SouthArk photo ID to the recruited proctor who will verify that the student did his or her own work and followed the testing procedures prescribed by the instructor. In some cases, the student may have to pay a proctoring fee to the institution where the test is taken. The proctor will sign a document similar to the sample below to certify that the student took his or her test under the prescribed conditions.

### **Sample Proctor's Certification of Testing Conditions**

*By signing this form, I certify that \_\_\_\_\_ took this Comp II exam with no more than two hours to work and did not receive any outside help with the test. To the best of my knowledge, the attached test paper is the student's work. The student may use a dictionary and his or her Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers as references during the test.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Proctor's Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## **IX. Attendance:**

Faculty members at South Arkansas Community College expect students to participate in all instructional activities in the online and hybrid courses they take for credit.

### **A. Online Attendance Policy**

Students must log in on the first day of class and submit a graded academic assignment (an assignment that counts toward the student's course grade) by the 11th day class during a regular semester or during the equivalent of the 11th class meeting during a compressed session (summer school classes, mini-mesters, etc.). Students who do not log in and submit such an assignment by the 11th day or its equivalent will be dropped from the course.

Student attendance in online courses will be defined as active participation, which will be characterized by the student's timely submission of graded academic assignments. A student is expected to complete all such assignments by the appropriate due date. Failure to submit three graded academic assignments may trigger an Excessive Absence Notice, a form that positions the instructor to drop students in breach of the policy if they do not improve their participation.

### **B. Hybrid Attendance Policy**

Hybrid courses have classroom and online attendance requirements. Student attendance in hybrid courses will be defined as active participation, which will be characterized by attending class and the student's timely submission of graded academic assignments. Students enrolled in a hybrid course will meet with their instructor on the first day of the class. The syllabus should include the dates that students are required to be on campus. Failure to submit three graded academic

assignments or missing three classes may trigger an Excessive Absence Notice.

Departments and programs governed by accreditation or certification standards may have different attendance policies. Instructors may further refine these requirements to fit a particular course. Such additional requirements should be clearly stated in the syllabus and should not contradict the letter or spirit of the college's policy as stated above.

Students who stop attending class for any reason should contact Enrollment Services to officially withdraw from the course. Failure to officially withdraw may result in a failing grade for the course.