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Distance Learning Policy

Type

Academic (relates to academic affairs generally, faculty and/or student affairs)

I. Rationale

The purposes of this policy are to ensure distance learning at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) 1) meets the needs of students 2) complies with state and federal regulations in regards to Distance Learning, and 3) ensures the quality of educational programs offering Distance Learning.

II. Stakeholders Affected by this Policy

Compliance with this policy is mandatory for:

- all BCM schools and programs offering Distance Learning courses;
- all students enrolled in a distance education course for academic credit (offered by any BCM school or degree-granting program); and
- BCM faculty and staff responsible for administering Distance Learning courses.

III. Definitions

- Distance Education**, as defined by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction in the course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. The National Council for State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement (NC-SARA) defines Distance Education as instruction offered by any means where the student and faculty member are in separate physical locations. Distance Education includes, but is not limited to, online, interactive video and correspondence courses or programs.
- Distance Learning** is learning that includes Distance Education and/or supervised field experiences.
- Educational Information Technology System** (Educational IT System) is a Learning Management System, e.g., Blackboard, E*Value, ExamSoft.
- Education Record** is defined in the Student Records Policy (23.1.06). Education Records are commonly referred to as “student records.”
- Enterprise Computing Account** (ECA) is a unique user identification required to access the BCM information systems network.
- Supervised Field Experience** (SFE), as defined by NC-SARA, means a student learning experience comprised primarily of the practical application of previously studied theories and skills, under the oversight of a supervisor, mentor, faculty member or other qualified professional, located in the host state, who has a direct or indirect reporting responsibility to the institution where the student is enrolled whether or not credit is granted. The supervised field experience is part of a program of study offered by the enrolling SARA institution. Examples include practica, student teaching, or internships.

- (g) **Time on task** (TOT) is the total learning time spent by a student in a college course, including instructional time as well as time spent studying and completing course assignments (e.g., reading, research, writing, individual and group projects).

IV. Policy

A. **Data Security & Integrity.**

1. Confidentiality.
 - a. Consistent with the Student Records Policy (23.1.06), all programs offering Distance Learning courses must generate and handle education records in accordance with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#)), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, and associated regulations in order to protect the privacy of Education Records and the rights of the student.
 - b. Faculty providing Distance Learning education must instruct students on their obligation to maintain the confidentiality of Distance Education course materials and the privacy of other students enrolled in the online course.
 - c. The College expects each student to 1) preserve the academic integrity of Distance Education courses and maintain the confidentiality of course materials, including any assessments administered during the course and/or outside the classroom setting, and 2) uphold the privacy of other students enrolled in the course, not sharing personal information divulged by another student outside the virtual classroom, discussion, forum, or assessment setting.
2. Secure Location. Unless otherwise required, all Distance Education courses must be secured and housed within BCM's intranet or on one of its secure Educational IT Systems. Education Records will be stored and maintained as described in the Student Records Policy.
3. Identity Verification.
 - a. BCM has practices in place to ensure the student who registers in a Distance Learning course is the same student who participates in and completes the course and receives the credit, by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework.
 - b. All students must be issued a unique username for all BCM activities including email and the BCM student portal.
 - c. Student identity must be verified through secure log in, proctored examinations, and/or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

B. **Oversight.**

1. Administration. BCM must be an active participant in ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the courses and programs if contractual/consortia agreements exist for the delivery of those courses/programs. BCM also oversees the compliance of its educational programs with applicable laws, regulations, and standards.
2. Compliance with International Law. BCM Schools and Programs offering Distance Education to BCM students in any other country does not require further approval from that country. If BCM offers Distance Education to non-BCM students in any other country this may require approval from that country.
3. Course Direction and Instruction. All Distance Education courses must be taught by BCM faculty of record, who ensure the rigor of the courses and quality of instruction, consistent with best practices.
4. Faculty Availability. Sufficient BCM faculty must be appropriately trained including but not limited to the use of online teaching modules, effective online teaching, assessment resources, and student support services such that adequate numbers of faculty of record are always available to teach Distance Education courses.
5. Faculty Education. Schools offering Distance Education courses must make Distance Education training available to participating faculty. All faculty participating in Distance

Education must have documented Distance Education competency. All faculty training on Distance Education must be approved by the Office of the Provost.

C. Quality Control.

1. Access to BCM Resources. Students must have the ability to access academic support services, student services, library resources and technical support. Students may request support for these services and advising from their instructor.
2. Course Credit. All Distance Education courses must utilize the TOT guidelines, as approved by the Office of the Provost, to calculate the amount of time students are spending on academic tasks (e.g., time on task, academically engaged time) per semester hour of credit.
3. Course Design.
 - a. Evaluation of Distance Education courses, including participating faculty, must be reviewed annually to ensure and monitor compliance in Distance Education practices and procedures.
 - b. Distance Education courses must be comparable to campus based courses as evidenced by the evaluation of educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes and student satisfaction.
4. Fees. Students must be notified in advance of any additional costs associated with administration of Distance Education and the verification of student identity. Advertising and course curriculum information must accurately depict which courses are offered online.

V. Responsibilities

A. School and Programs.

1. Schools and Programs offering Distance Learning courses must comply with policies and procedures outlined herein.
2. Schools and Programs offering SFEs must provide the Office of the Registrar information on the facility/site, city and state for students taking SFEs.
3. Schools and Programs not using a previously approved application service, e.g., VSLO, must work with the Office of General Counsel to identify international requirements for SFEs before registering students.

B. Each academic program offering Distance Education courses will

1. Maintain TOT for each course and assign the appropriate number of semester credits for each course based on the TOT Guidelines (see appendix).
2. Maintain program compliance with applicable U.S. Laws. Programs offering Distance Education courses to students in states other than Texas must ensure compliance with applicable state and federal regulations for Distance Education.

C. The Office of Information Technology and Academic IT will update and maintain the software used for Distance Education courses. Secure access to student records through BCM's database systems and BCM's Educational IT Systems are controlled by the Office of Information Technology.

VI. Procedures for Implementation and Review

A. Student Data Security.

1. The following procedures electronically establish the identity of the student, and prevent any other person from accessing a student's information:
 - a. *Passwords*. To protect student privacy, passwords must be constructed according to a set of rules spelled out by Office of Information Technology in the Data Security Policy (12.1.14).
 - b. *Secure Login*. Students access online course management software using single sign-on, which uses their ECA as a unique identifier and their associated password.

2. Employee access to Education Records is restricted, unless the employee has completed FERPA training and there is a legitimate educational interest in the Record. (see 23.1.06)
 3. BCM Employees must use their ECAs to access the BCM network, information systems, and assets. All BCM personnel are required to change their password every 90 days to simplify the management of passwords, improve BCM network security, and meet audit requirements.
- B. Access to BCM Resources.**
1. Schools and/or Program Directors offering Distance Education courses meet as needed with library administration annually to ensure tools and resources are appropriate for those students taking Distance Education courses.
 2. An annual survey will be conducted by the Office of Student Services or designee to ensure that students have access to library resources and student services.
- C. Schedule for Policy Review.**
1. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as necessary, but at least every five years.

VII. Stakeholder Compliance

Each program will comply with the SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement, any other relevant Distance Education or Distance Learning state and federal laws, regulations, or accreditation standards.

VIII. Tools

- SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement
- Office of the Provost - TOT Guidelines
- FERPA in AMP

IX. Related Policies

- [12.1.14 - Data Security Policy](#)
- [23.1.06 – Student Records Policy](#)
- [23.1.08 - Student Appeals & Grievances Policy](#)
- [23.1.11 - Credit Hour Policy](#)

X. Applicable Laws, Regulations & Standards

A. Standards

- Best Practices in Distance Education
- [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g;
- National Distance Education Standards

B. Institution & School Accreditation Requirements

- [Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education \(ACGME\) Common Program Requirements](#)
- [Liaison Committee on Medical Education \(LCME\) Standards: Functions and Structure of a Medical School I](#)
- [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges \(SACSCOC\) Accreditation Standards](#) (see Standard 10.6)

C. Program Accreditation Requirements

- [Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education \(ACCME\)](#)
- [Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling \(ACGC\)](#)
- [Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. \(ARC-PA\)](#)

- [American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene \(ASTMH\)](#)
- [Council on Accreditation \(COA\) of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs](#)
- [Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs \(CAAHEP\)](#)
- [National Commission on Prosthetic and Orthotic Education \(NCOPE\)](#)