Academic Guidelines for Off-Campus and Distance Learning Programs

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Note: For definitions related to distance education, see Definitions Related to Distance Education.

1. Degrees/credentials offered through off-campus or distance education programs should be offered only in disciplines where academic strengths exist.

2. If a parallel on-campus program exists, the distance education program should have the same learning goals and academic requirements as the on-campus program.

3. Admission criteria and academic standards should be as rigorous as those used by the school for its on-campus programs.

4. To offer students the same quality, rigor and adherence to the highest professional standards as on-campus programs, off-campus and distance education programs must include permanent (tenure- or appointment-stream) Pitt faculty members as instructors or program coordinators/directors.

5. Adequate academic support infrastructure must be available. This includes adequate access to library and computing resources and laboratories

6. Students should have access to student services such as registration, withdrawal, payment of bills, withdrawal from courses, etc.

7. Students should have access to appropriate academic advising.

8. Any internship experience or research experience must be overseen by University of Pittsburgh faculty or academic administrators.

9. A new academic planning proposal must be submitted through Curriculog for the distance learning program even if a parallel on-campus program already exists.

10. Units interested in hybrid and online programs are advised to consult with Pitt EDGE prior to proposing a new program.

11. The program must provide faculty support services specifically designed to support off-campus and distance education. This includes professional development opportunities, instructional design support, and technological support to ensure faculty are prepared to design, deliver, and evaluate distance-education courses effectively. Faculty must be provided with access to training, resources, and technical assistance appropriate to the instructional technologies and learning management systems used in the program.

   Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (C-RAC) as incorporated by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA)

12. The program must ensure that the electronic equipment and technology infrastructure used for off-campus or distance education is appropriate, reliable, and sufficient to support effective instruction and learning for students. The program must clearly inform students, prior to registration, of any required or recommended technology, equipment, software, internet connectivity, or technical skills necessary to participate successfully. When institutional resources or services are provided to support access to required technology, the program must maintain processes to ensure timely availability and appropriate technical support.

   21st Century Distance Education Guidelines as incorporated by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)

13. The program must be designed to provide for appropriate and regular substantive interaction between faculty and students and, where pedagogically appropriate, among students. Course design must intentionally incorporate opportunities for meaningful engagement that support learning outcomes. There must be scheduled and predictable opportunities for instructor/student interaction and at least two forms of substantive interaction should be utilized, including providing direct instruction, providing information or responding to questions about course content or competency, and/or assessing or providing feedback on a student's course work, facilitating group/collaborative or participatory learning activities appropriate to the modality and discipline.

   U.S. Department of Education regulations for Distance Education and Innovation (2021)

14. The program must employ appropriate methods to assess student learning outcomes in off-campus and distance education courses. Assessment strategies must be aligned with stated learning outcomes and must be equivalent in rigor, scope, and expectations to those used in comparable on-campus courses or programs. The program must use assessment results to inform instructional improvement and ensure academic quality across delivery modalities.

Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (C-RAC) as incorporated by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA)