



Policy Name:	Online Learning
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Approving Authority:	Northwest Leadership Team
Responsible Office:	Provost
Category:	Enrollment and Academics

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define the guidelines, procedures, and requirements for distance learning courses at the university, including online and blended courses.

II. Policy

University faculty, staff, and students will adhere to the following standards and procedures in offering and taking distance learning courses.

Distance learning is any educational environment that involves technology-enabled teaching and delivery outside the traditional on-campus classroom. These types of courses are defined under one heading for which all regularly scheduled class time is replaced by required activities completed at a distance and/or managed online. The content within a distance learning course and the on-campus course does not differ. The difference is the mode in which the content is delivered. The material covered is equivalent to that offered in a face-to-face section of the same course and the distance learning course has the same credit value as the face-to-face equivalent.

DEFINITIONS

Blended Course: To be considered blended, a course will use a mix of online, face-to-face delivery, and/or web conferencing.

- Blended courses, excluding those that use of a web conference tool should include the following Special Message: "Delivered through a mix of online and face-to-face meetings (approximately 50 percent taught online vs. on-campus)."

- Blended courses using a web conference tool that also meet at a physical location, (i.e. Maryville, Kansas City) should include a Special Message in the course schedule listing of CatPAWS as follows: “Delivered through a mix of online, web conferencing, and face-to-face meetings (list all required meeting dates/times).”
- Blended courses using a web conference tool that do not meet at a physical location, should have the location listed as ‘Web Conference.’ Provide the day/time for regular web conference meetings, and a Special Message as follows: “Delivered through a mix of online and web conferencing (list all required meeting dates/times).”

Hybrid Online Programs: Programs that are offered primarily online but still have at least one requirement for a physical meeting or activity on-campus should not be considered an Online Program and should be treated as blended courses. This would include requirements for graduate comprehensive assessments, or on-campus practicums. Provide the Special Message, “Delivered through a mix of online meetings and [e.g., on-campus practicum or on-campus graduate comprehensive assessments].”

- Programs that are offered primarily online but have requirements for asynchronous off-campus meetings or activities should be considered online.

Learning Management System (LMS): An LMS is software used by Northwest faculty to organize and deliver course content to students. The current LMS vendor is Canvas.

- Faculty may sometimes attempt to use an alternative LMS for a specific purpose, including pedagogical research. It is highly recommended that the Learning and Teaching Center is made aware of such activities in advance and it is understood that limited or no support for this activity is available. If an alternate LMS is part of a study that will be presented in scholarly works, then all research guidelines and policies such as approval from Institutional Review Board.
- Faculty that may be working with other institutions to offer a course may have the need to use the LMS of another institution. Support for those activities will come from the institution providing that LMS.

Northwest-Kansas City: The name for the university’s facility and physical location in Gladstone, Missouri. Graduate and completion programs are offered at this facility.

Northwest Online: Northwest Online is the university’s local brand for the LMS, which is currently Canvas.

Off-site: Programs offered at Northwest-Kansas City and other approved locations.

Online Course: Online courses are hosted in the LMS without any synchronous meetings in a physical location.

Online Learning: Online learning includes all of the technologies including software, hardware, and learning environments that are used to deliver classes via the internet.

Online Programs: Online programs are the degrees/certificates offered entirely online via Northwest Online. Students do not physically come to class at any location but take the courses in the online programs via the learning management system.

Web Conferencing System: The software system used for synchronous or real-time communications over the Internet among participants. These include text, audio, video, graphics, presentations, and a variety of other contents. The current vendors used for web conferencing software are Zoom and Skype for Business.

PROGRAM STANDARDS

Northwest strives to offer online, blended, and distance courses that are of the highest quality. Each course meets the standards specified by the Higher Learning Commission-North Central Accreditation and the Missouri Department of Higher Education.

Northwest's online, blended, and distance learning courses will:

1. Provide an academic activity during the first 15% of academic days from the term start date and inform the student of the consequences of non-participation in course activities and requirements.
2. Maintain high academic integrity.
3. Require regular and substantive academic interaction between the student and faculty member at the beginning of the semester and continuing through the required course meeting calendar.
4. Meet or exceed Distance Learning requirements implemented by the Missouri Department of Higher Education, Higher Learning Commission, and Title IV requirements from the Department of Education.
5. Provide both the rigor of courses and the quality of instruction.
6. Provide the appropriate technology to the nature of the objective of each course.
7. Provide an up-to-date and current online platform (i.e., Canvas or equivalent).
8. Provide current materials, programs, and courses.
9. Allow access to equipment and technical expertise required for online, blended, and distance learning courses.
10. Provide students with information on how to access and effectively use appropriate library resources (MOBIUS, consortium of Missouri's academic libraries, etc.)
11. Northwest will provide a means for course evaluation by each student.
12. Provide online, blended, and distance learning courses that are of equal quality to those offered on campus.
13. Online, blended, and distance learning course materials will comply with accessibility standards such as ADA. Assistance may be found at the Office of Equity and Accessibility (attention Accessibility Coordinator) 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64668 or call (660) 562-1639.
14. Evaluate for effectiveness by assessment of student learning outcomes, student evaluations and data concerning student retention.
15. Have faculty assume responsibility for course oversight and adherence to online, blended, and distance learning policies.
16. Be designed using the Quality Matters (QM) standards.
17. Complete an internal QM review at minimum.
18. Complete an official QM review.

Northwest's Exemplary Course Standards Course Design

1. The availability of online, blended, and distance learning course content is varied and could be provided through learning modules, individual pages, hyperlinks to outside resources or internal resources, embedded media, individual organizer pages, etc.
2. Learning modules should contain appropriate tools that enhance the learning process. Examples of specific tools include, but are not limited to, various media formats, quizzes, discussion, notes pages, assignments, projects, course guideline documents, and others.
3. Various instructional methods are used to enhance student learning. These include visual, auditory, and print-based stimuli.

Ancillary resources will be made available to students through the learning management system platform (i.e. Canvas, etc.). Tools could include features such as grades, announcements, discussion board, blogs, calendar, email, etc.

Learning and Teaching Center (LTC) and Information Technology (IT) Responsibilities

1. Ensure the web-based platform(s) (i.e., Canvas, etc.) used are frequently updated and kept current. (LTC)
2. Procure and maintain equipment and technical expertise required for online, blended, and distance learning courses. (LTC and IT)
3. Provide materials and links to external training tools. Provide appropriate training to faculty. (LTC)
4. Create course and have course populated a minimum of one week prior to the first day of class. (LTC)
5. Administer the online, blended, and distance learning student evaluation instrument for all courses each semester. (LTC and IT)
6. Manage and staff the support “help desk” for students/faculty. (IT)

Faculty Responsibilities

1. Adhere to the Missouri Department of Education’s “Principles of Good Practice for Distance Learning”.
2. The Northwest (LTC) will provide materials and links to external training tools. Faculty members may seek training from the LTC, colleagues, or be self-trained. It is required that faculty teaching online, blended, and distance learning classes use Northwest Online as their course learning management system (LMS).
3. Use only the LMS and other learning technologies (software, apps, etc.) provided and/or approved by the Learning and Teaching Center for university courses.
4. Have online and blended classes ready for students no later than the one week prior to the term. This will include a syllabus, course schedule (when appropriate and should include any required campus visits), and all materials to be used by students within the first two weeks of the term.
5. Require academic activity/essay/participation during the first 15% of academic days from the term start date to confirm attendance.
6. Include in the syllabus the criteria for active participation, attendance, approved proctors, and sites to be used.
7. Follow the outline and list of interactive academic activities found in the course syllabus.
8. Make students aware of online course evaluations.
9. Respond to all student emails, discussion boards, etc. within 48 hours or two business days using their Northwest email account. (Due to privacy regulations, faculty and staff can communicate with students only through the Northwest email and not a private account).
10. Use an appropriate textbook for the online, blended, and distance learning course.
11. Provide students with up-to-date grades, post/submit final grades and maintain a grade book for five years.
12. Recognize that attendance is vital to student success. In online learning situations at Northwest, a student will not come to campus and sit in the classroom. Where this is the case, attendance is determined by the student’s active participation, regular and substantive academic interaction throughout the course, communication beginning the first week of classes and completion of competencies at the end of the course (emails, discussion board, group projects, etc.)
13. Ensure that students are aware of the consequences of non-engagement in a course.
14. Make efforts to contact a student who enrolled but did not engage in an academic activity the first week of class.
15. Recognize that assessment of student learning is timely, appropriate and responsive to the needs of the individual learner.
16. Recognize methods of assessment may include (but not limited to): examinations, papers, projects, etc.
17. Ensure assignment objectives and academic activities are clearly communicated, utilize critical thinking and make use of outside resources.
18. Ensure assignments and assessments align with the objectives of the course and the mission of the university.
19. Document achievement of student learning outcomes.

20. Include opportunities in online, blended, and distance learning courses for communication and/or cooperation among members of the class.
21. Use activities such as proctoring, email, phone, video chat or videophone, short internships, etc. to ensure the student who enrolls in a course is the same student who submits assignments, takes exams, and earns a final grade and protect student privacy in verifying student identity.
22. Use a variety of tools supported by Northwest Online where necessary such as announcements, blogs, discussion board, emails, etc.
23. Provide appropriate contact information in the syllabus.
24. Provide resources in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act as identified by the Office of Equity and Accessibility, and refer all student requests for disability accommodation due to disability (including extra time on assignments, captioning, special equipment, etc.) to that office.
25. Continually review and evaluate courses for content and effectiveness.
26. Be available during posted office hours, via email, phone, discussion board, etc. Office hours are listed on the course syllabus.

Student Responsibilities

1. Understand that interacting and participating in a distance learning (online, blended) course is a different style of learning.
2. Participate and communicate in a course beginning the first week of classes. Students must engage in a substantive ACADEMIC activity during the first 15% of academic days from the term start date in order to maintain their financial aid. Signing into Northwest Online without participating in an online or blended assignment or activity does not constitute attendance.
3. If interaction and participation by the student does not occur during the first week of classes, efforts will be made by the faculty member to contact the student. If non-participation continues beyond the first week, an email will be sent and/or contact by faculty member/advisor will be made the student outlining the consequences of non-participation. If regular and substantial interaction does not occur as a result, the student's information may be entered into Northwest Success 360 (Northwest's student CRM) for further efforts to follow-up with the student.
4. **Financial aid awards may be decreased for students who do not attend some of their courses, even though they are not dropped by the university. It is the student's responsibility to drop or withdraw from courses within the appropriate time periods. If proper procedure is not followed, grades earned will be recorded on the student's permanent record.**
5. Students should log in frequently, actively interact and participate in course activities and discussions and check Northwest email daily.
6. Students who succeed in online and blended courses keep a schedule just as they would if they were attending class on campus and they communicate with one another and their instructor frequently.
7. Attendance and academic participation are vital to success in online, blended, and distance learning courses.
8. On rare occasions extenuating circumstances may occur, such as an extreme illness, death in the immediate family, or military duty, etc. It is the student's responsibility to provide appropriate documentation in a timely manner to substantiate such circumstances at which time the instructor will determine if an extension is warranted. Students and instructors of online courses adhere to the academic calendar and the process of appeal.

Examples of circumstances that are NOT considered extenuating:

- Registering late for the class
- Failure to read the syllabus
- Failure to plan appropriately

- Not having the appropriate textbook or software
- Technical problems

Meeting Deadlines

1. Each instructor's syllabus will explain when assignments are due (example 11:55 P.M., Central Standard Time).
2. Students should plan ahead for the unexpected (technology or personal problems).
3. Students are accountable for staying on the schedule as outlined in the syllabus.
4. Students should immediately communicate with their instructor if an emergency may affect the ability to meet course deadlines. Waiting until the course is over greatly diminishes the ability to make a change.
5. An online or blended course may provide the flexibility to do coursework when it best fits a student's schedule. However, while certain courses may have flexibility, the course requires student accountability for meeting the deadlines. Students should set aside time to participate in their online, blended, and distance learning course and to complete assignments. Students will have frequent deadlines to keep focused and not fall behind. Playing catch-up on missed assignment or deadlines causes stress, and stress reduces learning.
6. Students are required to submit coursework according to the directions provided in the syllabus. Examples are:
 - Post discussion board threads and replies in the appropriate forum.
 - Submit written assignments or other projects according to the instructor's directions in the syllabus.
7. Students should save an electronic copy of all assignments until the final grade is posted.
8. Grades and feedback will be available via the grade book on Northwest Online or from the instructor directly.

Interaction with Instructor

Interaction with a course instructor is very important. Each student is given a Northwest email account by which the university communicates with students in many areas. Students should constantly (daily) check their Northwest e-mail account for important information and updates. It is very important to interact and complete an ACADEMIC activity/assignment during the first ten calendar days of class for an 8-week class and the first six calendar days of a four-week class and continually communicate with the instructor, particularly during the first week of classes, for financial aid purposes. If there are questions about an assignment, project etc., students should communicate with the instructor via the methods outlined in the syllabus.

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for being aware of Northwest's Code of Academic Integrity. Students are responsible for knowing and following the university's policies and procedures regarding academic integrity. These guidelines and more information related to academic integrity are available in the *undergraduate and graduate academic catalogs*. In sum, this information provides that each student's level of knowledge and understanding is a vital part of the teaching process and requires tangible measures through the process of evaluation. Misrepresenting the relationship between the work being evaluated and the student's actual state of knowledge is an act of academic dishonesty; these acts of dishonesty include but are not limited to: fraud, cheating, plagiarism, forgery, and other forms of academic misconduct. Students are obligated to review the academic integrity information sources carefully and to seek needed clarification from the instructor concerning questions about collaborative work, citation of sources, or other issues related to academic integrity.

Proctoring Requirement

Some online and blended courses require a proctored test(s) where students must take the test(s) in the presence of an approved proctor who will verify student identity and monitor the completion of the exam(s). Instructors may allow students to take proctored exam(s) off campus where necessary. In cases where students may choose to have proctors administer the exam(s); the instructor must approve the proctor. Students are responsible for making appropriate proctoring arrangements and supply both the instructor and the proctor with complete and accurate information.

Northwest also uses online proctoring software which requires the use of a web camera. Currently, the software being used is Respondus Monitor.

Standards of Online and Blended Course Student Conduct

Appropriate academic conduct includes doing assigned work, meeting deadlines, participating in discussions, and completing all the required elements of the course. It also means following these basic rules of etiquette:

- Using proper capitalization, spelling, and grammar
- Signing your name to all email messages and discussion postings
- Proving descriptive but concise subject lines

Appropriate academic conduct also means maintaining a safe learning environment based on mutual respect and civility regardless of the mode of delivery. All participants in Northwest Online and blended courses are expected to behave professionally by adhering to these online, blended, and distance learning standards of conduct.

- Never transmit or promote content known to be illegal.
- Respect other people's privacy as well as your own.
- Forgive other people's mistakes.
- Never use harassing, threatening, or otherwise abusive language or actions.

Refer to the Northwest Catalog or Student Handbook further explanations.

Repeated misconduct will be reported to the appropriate associate provost, which may result in removal from the course. If students have any questions regarding misconduct, contact their instructor with their concerns.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Students requiring accommodation must make a written request for services each semester and provide documentation of disability to the Office of Equity and Accessibility (attention Accessibility Coordinator) 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64668 or call (660) 562-1639. More information on the request process is available at: <https://www.nwmissouri.edu/diversity/accessibility/index.htm>. Once this process is complete, it is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor immediately if special assistance or devices are needed to accommodate a disability. Northwest complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Withdrawals and Refunds

Information regarding withdrawing from (i.e., dropping) courses or withdrawing from the university and regarding refunds is available at: <https://www.nwmissouri.edu/bursar/financialdates.htm>.

Concerns, Complaints and Appeals Procedures

If a student has a question, concern, or complaint about a course, the first step should usually be to contact the instructor. If the issue cannot be resolved with the instructor, students should follow the appropriate appeal policy as outlined in the Northwest catalog or Student Handbook.

Agreement

Students who disagree with the policies or procedures or cannot accept the demands of a course should drop or withdraw from the course as soon as possible. By remaining in the course, students are agreeing to comply with all the policies and procedures of the course.

Basic Computer and Software Requirements

To participate in online and blended courses, students must have access to a basic level of equipment and software.