Standards for Distance Learning: Introduction

Palo Verde College is a leader in instructional technology. Of paramount importance to the college faculty, students, and administration is the issue of maintaining course quality standards. The purpose of this document is to unify existing college policies related to online instruction and correspondence instruction, to provide faculty with a resource for online and correspondence instruction at Palo Verde College, and to provide a framework for the management of instructional techniques and technologies.

There are two separate modalities as defined in the August 2009 Distance Education & Correspo0ndence Education Manual, a publication of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

1.   Distance Education

Distance Education Definition: For the purpose of this document, this statement has been adapted from the Title 5, Distance Education Guidelines for the California Community Colleges, §55200. Distance Education includes online courses, interactive television courses and hybrid courses.

Distance education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology. In addition, instruction provided as distance education is subject to the requirements that may be imposed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. §12100 et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. §794d).

2.   Correspondence Education

Correspondence Education Definition: For the purpose of this document, this statement has been adapted from the Distance Education and Correspondence Education Manual published by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges; Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Correspondence education means education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence education is not distance education.

CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION

Correspondence and Hybrid Definitions

Correspondence education means education where the institution provides instructional materials by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence education is not distance education.

Hybrid Correspondence education is the combination of correspondence and face-to face interaction with the instructor. Students may be required to attend on-campus meetings and/or take examinations with a proctor.

Instructor Competencies

Instructors must work to ensure that the correspondence class matches the rigor and academic standards of the course outline of record. Please be aware that correspondence students may live in the Palo Verde Valley, but many live elsewhere in Riverside County, throughout California and many students are incarcerated in California and Federal jails and prisons.

First-time correspondence education instructors will read the "Handbook for Correspondence Instructor" and meet with Distance Learning staff for a brief orientation.

Course Outline and Textbook

A copy of the Course Outline, as adopted by the California Community College Chancellor's Office and the Palo Verde College Board of Trustees, will be provided to the correspondence instructor. All courses must be taught according to the course outline. Textbooks for each course are selected by the full-time faculty teaching the subject.

Regular Effective Contact

Correspondence education regulations require that a student have regular, effective contact with their instructor. Students enrolled in correspondence education classes must have the same opportunity to have their questions answered and receive feedback as to their progress as students enrolled in traditional face-to-face courses. At Palo Verde College, regular effective contact is defined as at least nine (9) different contacts (to include syllabus, midterm and final exams) with and opportunities to ask questions of an instructor. This means that instructors need to have students turn in work on at least six different dates and the instructor needs to promptly return the graded work with the necessary feedback.

Feedback

The most common complaint from students is lack of feedback. Students need to know how they are performing in their classes. Constructive feedback is critical to a student's successful completion of your course. Suggestions:

a. Keep a list of assignments and check off when one is received. Return the list to the student every time an assignment is returned (Recommended as a Standard of Best Practice).
b. Attach a grading sheet to the assignment when returned and mark the grade points, etc. so students can see where they stand. (Recommended as a Standard of Best Practice.
c. Attach examples of correct answers or quality responses (Recommended as a Standard of Best Practice).

Syllabus

All courses must have a syllabus and this must be available prior to the first day of class each semester. The syllabus is considered a contract between students and instructors and must be very explicit and detailed. This will be the first contact the instructor has with the student and must include specific expectations of the course. A copy of the syllabus must be on file in the Vice President of Instructional Services' office by the beginning of the semester in which the class is being offered by correspondence education.

Student Competencies

Student Skills and Expectations: In order to support student success in correspondence education classes, students and faculty should be aware of core skills and expectations that promote student achievement in this learning environment. Students need to be able to work independently and must be motivated to complete the course within the semester time frame.

Student Skills and Learning Expectations

1. Awareness of institutional support services
2. Successful completion of prerequisite coursework
3. Organizational skills
4. Reading comprehension
5. Writing skills
6. Communication skills
7. Time-management skills
8. Recommended completion of online orientation or equivalent preparation
9. Motivated and focused
10. Aware of course expectations, environment and workload
11. Autonomous, self-motivated learner
12. Ability to work independently

13. Have the confidence to follow directions and to ask for assistance

Course Outline Approval for Correspondence Education courses

Course Approval: The Palo Verde College Curriculum Committee must approve courses for correspondence delivery. It is required that the department making the submission answer a series of questions developed to address feasibility, adequate preparations, and other concerns of the committee.

Correspondence Education Questions: The following questions need to be answered in the course outline template before submitting to the Curriculum Committee:

1. How will correspondence education course assignments differ from face-to-face courses?
2. The method of evaluation for correspondence courses must be included (i.e., evaluation of student performance may include quizzes, exams, writing assignments, and portfolio projects).
3. The method of instruction for correspondence education classes must be included (i.e., Instructor-student contact in correspondence education is maintained through various means, including but not limited to, telephone, e-mail, conventional mail correspondence, face-to-face review sessions, courier, and office hour conferencing. Correspondence education instructional technologies may include reading responses, videos, synchronous and asynchronous chat or messaging, response forms, and progress reports).
4. What are the benefits of offering this course contact via correspondence education?
5. Accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to all content delivery. A statement regarding this should be part of the course outline of record. "Students will be encouraged to direct themselves to the College's DSPS department, if they believe they have a learning disability.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Online , Interactive Television (ITV) and Hybrid Definitions

Online: All instruction occurs online. Access to e-mail and the Internet is required. Students may be required to complete work using e-mail, chat rooms, discussion boards, and other instructional tools.

Interactive Television (ITV): Instruction is offered via interactive television (closed circuit) to both Blythe students and Needles students. These courses can originate in either Blythe or Needles and are televised in real-time to the other campus.

Hybrid: Hybrid courses include the combination of traditional in-class instruction with computer-based learning and other instructional technologies. Therefore, students may be required to attend class meetings on campus and/or to take examinations with a proctor.

Orientation information is listed in the Class Schedule.

Basic Technology Competencies for Online Instructors: To maintain the highest standards in online instruction, instructors who wish to teach online courses for Palo Verde College should be proficient in certain basic technology skills such as the ability to compose content and transfer documents to their hosting web servers. Instructors can acquire these fundamental skills through an approved online certification course. Instructional Technology personnel will be available to assist faculty in acquiring the necessary skills and provide ongoing training to deliver online courses.

The five areas of basic technology competence include:

1. The ability to operate within one of the campus's standard operating systems (such as Windows) and be able to:
    a. Manage files
    b. Maneuver among multiple applications (multitasking)
2. The ability to use the campus standard work processing application (such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, etc.) and be able to:
    a. Use various formatting techniques
    b. Save document in the appropriate file format (such as .doc, .rtf, .html, .pdf, or others as appropriate.
    c. Edit documents
3. The ability to use the campus standard e-mail application (such as Microsoft Outlook for Windows) and be able to:
    a. Use address book
    b. Use group list
    c. Create and use folders
    d. Send, save, and open file attachments
    e. Send and receive messages
4. The ability to use the campus standard Course Learning environment (such as The Bridge) and be able to:
    a. Manage files
    b. Use the discussion board
    c. Navigate efficiently
    d. Use the chat room
    e. Post syllabus
    f. Administer tests and quizzes
    g. Post grades
5. The ability to make use of the Internet and be able to:
    a. Use various search techniques
    b. Download, locate, and open files
    c. Use Favorites/Bookmarks
    d. Use various browsers and search engines

Pedagogic Competencies: Palo Verde College prides itself in providing innovative instruction in a variety of modes, styles, and approaches. Online instruction will be no less dynamic and individualized;

however, the nature of teaching online requires instructors to reexamine and modify their pedagogies. Palo Verde College instructors wishing to teach online should demonstrate an awareness of the pedagogic opportunities and constraints inherent in online instruction.

Instructors can acquire the necessary fundamental skills through an approved online certification course and continuing training which will be offered through flex day and other opportunities throughout the academic year. Determining whether an instructor possesses the pedagogical competency to teach online is a decision that rests exclusively with that instructor and the instructor's department chair and the Office of Instruction. The Instruction Office will be advised of the successful completion of the online certification course.

Successful Completion as a Student in an Online Course: Instructors wishing to teach online must take at least one online course as a student. It is imperative for an instructor to experience this mode of delivery from the student's point of view.

Accessibility Requirement: Palo Verde College is committed to having effective communication with the widest audience possible; therefore, all online instructors must make every effort to provide accessibility for students with disabilities (e.g., for assistance in maximizing accessibility of course materials). Instructors Accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to all content delivery. Attention to access is required if courses entail the use of print media, audio or video conferencing (live or pre-recorded), the Web, or software such as CD-ROM or DVD. Specifically:

1. All web-based material will need to be presented using the accessibility guidelines in the Palo Verde College handbook.
2. Any visual enhancements will need to have "alt" tags and alternate text descriptions to provide access for students with visual impairments.
3. Voice and sound enhancements will need to have closed captioning.
4. When necessary, text versions of web pages will also need to be made available.
5. Course web pages should include a statement requesting students with disabilities to apprise the instructor of limitations so that special needs can be met in a timely manner.
6. When access is not compatible with a student's disability, the instructor will need to make available alternative methods of instruction.

Additional Recommendations for First-Time Online Instructors: Palo Verde College will provide the support necessary for faculty to meet the following recommendations:

1. First-time online instructors will agree to be mentored by Faculty or Instructional Technology staff or Distance Learning staff with experience in online instruction during the entire first semester of the course offering.
2. The course to be taught online must be a course that the first-time online instructor has had adequate training and preparation to teach.
3. Whenever possible, the same course that is to be offered online by the first-time online instructor shall be offered in the traditional classroom manner.

4. First-time online instructor should use e-mail as a communication tool in at least one traditional classroom course during the semester preceding the online course offering.
5. First-time online instructors will agree NOT to teach more than one online course for the first semester.
6. First-time online instructors will agree to make all course materials accessible to persons with disabilities. Instructors will agree to meet with DSPS staff members for assistance in maximizing accessibility of course materials.

Regular Effective Contact: For the purpose of this document, this statement has been adapted from the Distance Education section of Title V of the California Education Code, which states:

55204. Instructor Contact

In addition to the requirements of Title V section 55002 of the California Education Code, and any locally established requirements applicable to all courses, district-governing boards shall ensure that:

(a) All approved courses offered as distance education include regular effective contact between instructor and students, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, correspondence, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities.

(b) All distance education courses are delivered consistent with guidelines issued by the Chancellor pursuant to section 409 of the Procedures and Standing Orders of the Board of Governors. Regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter pursuant to Title 5, section 53200.

In hybrid or online courses, regular effective contact is based on a mutual effort between faculty and students. Ensuring regular effective instructor/student contact guarantees that the student receives the benefit of the instructor's presence in the learning environment, both as a provider of instructional information and as a facilitator of student learning. Subsection (a) stresses the responsibility of the instructor in a distance education course to initiate regular contact with enrolled students to verify their participation and performance status. The use of the term "regular effective contact" in this context suggests that students should have frequent opportunities to ask questions and receive answers from the instructor of record.

Regular effective contact is defined as at least one contact between instructor and student per week. Instructors may set up virtual office hours to enable students to ask questions and receive instruction.

Syllabus

All courses must have a syllabus and this must be posted on Palo Verde College's Bridge site at the beginning of each semester. The syllabus is considered a contract between students and instructors and must be very explicit and detailed. This will be the first contact the instructor has with the student and must include specific expectations of the course. A copy of the syllabus must be on file in the Vice President of Instructional Services' office by the beginning of the semester in which the class is being offered by distance education.

Student Competencies for Online Instruction

Student Skills and Expectations: In order to support student success in online classes, students and faculty should be aware of core skills and expectations that promote student achievement in an online learning environment

Student Skills

1. Basic computer skills
   d. The ability to use the campus standard word processing applications such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, etc.
   e. Send and receive e-mail and attachments
   f. Download files
   g. Fundamentals of file management
   h. Search and navigate the Internet using a browser
2. Awareness of institutional support services and training available
3. Successful completion of prerequisite coursework
4. Organizational skills
5. Reading comprehension
6. Writing skills
7. Communication skills
8. Time-management skills
9. Proficiency in any adaptive computing software/hardware needed to access the online course material when there is a disability-related barrier
10. Recommended completion of online orientation or equivalent preparation
11. Familiarity with college course management system (such as The Bridge)

Student Learning Expectations

1. Motivated and focused
2. Awareness of online expectations, environment and workload
3. Autonomous, self-motivated learner
4. Positive attitude toward technology
5. Intention to complete the course
6. Ability to work independently
7. Ability to work as a group member
8. Having the confidence to follow directions and to ask for assistance

Course Outline Approval for Online Delivery

Course Approval: The Palo Verde College Curriculum Committee must approve courses for online delivery. The course outlines must be revised to address this new technology-mediated delivery method.

Distance Education Questions: The following questions need to be answered in the course outline template before submitting to the Curriculum Committee:

1. Describe how this course will be presented as a distance education course so that objectives, as written in the course outline, may be met. How will you ensure both the rigor and quality of instruction of the distance education course consistent with the course outline of record?
2. Describe how you will address the educational effectiveness of this course (including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction to ensure comparability with the course outline of record.
3. Regular and effective contact, per Title 5, Section 55376, takes place through office visits, telephone conversation, e-mail exchanges, virtual office hours, traditional course lectures, group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, video conferences, supplemental or student sessions, and/or field trips. The use of the term, "regular effective contact" suggests that students should have frequent opportunities to ask questions and receive answers from the instructor of record. Describe how this will take place. Regular and effective weekly contact is the responsibility of the instructor, not the student. Describe how distance education meets these requirements for this course as compared to the traditional course, including class size.
4. If the course contains a lab element, how will lab work, as opposed to homework, be measured?
5. Does the offering of this course through distance education require any special equipment and materials beyond a basic computer and web browser? How will you meet these needs?
6. Accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to all content delivery. A statement regarding this should be part of the course outline of record. "Students will be encouraged to direct themselves to the College's DSPS department, if they believe they have a learning disability.

Instructor Competencies for Interactive Television (ITV) Courses

1. Instructors will manage these classes as face-to-face classes with students in both Blythe and Needles.
2. Instructors will need to be trained in the use of the technology involved, i.e., how to work the camera, how to move the camera to see the entire classroom, how to make the connection between the two campuses. Instructional Technology personnel can provide assistance if needed.
3. Faculty will need to post office hours and make contact available via e-mail or ITV for students at the remote campus.
4. Instructor will need to make arrangements with the remote campus for the delivery of classroom materials.

Student Competencies for Interactive Television (ITV) Courses

1. Students will attend these classes as face-to-face classes. Attendance will be recorded.
2. Students need to be aware of arrangements for the receipt and delivery of classroom materials and assignments.

Course Outline Approval for Interactive Television (ITV) courses:

1. Describe how this course will be presented as an ITV course so that objectives, as written in the course outline may be met. How will you ensure both the rigor and quality of instruction of the ITV course?
2. If the course contains a lab element, how will lab work, as opposed to homework, be measured?
3. What are the benefits of offering this course content via ITV?
4 Accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to all content delivery. A statement regarding this should be part of the course outline of record. "Students will be encouraged to direct themselves to the College's DSPS department, if they believe they have a learning disability.