

MONTANA BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
Policy and Procedures Manual

SUBJECT: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
Policy 303.7 – Distributed Learning; Montana University System
Effective: March 25, 1999; Issued: June 2, 1999

I. Board Policy

A. Scope and Purpose

1. This policy is designed to encourage the development and use of distributed learning in the Montana university system (MUS) while at the same time ensuring a level of quality equivalent to that of traditional, classroom-based instruction.
2. The board of regents shall consider an institution's proposal to offer existing programs via distributed learning methodologies to be a request for a level I approval. Single courses meeting institutional academic standards do not require approval.
3. The commissioner of higher education shall appoint a member of the commissioner's staff to be the distributed learning coordinator and to chair an advisory committee on distributed learning and mediated instruction. The purpose of the advisory committee will be to advise the system and the board, through the council of academic officers, on matters related to present and future delivery of distributed education, including the acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery and/or learning systems.
4. The commissioner will encourage, facilitate and coordinate the distributed learning activities of the institutions.

II. Procedures

A. Definitions

1. Distributed Learning – A learning environment in which the instructor serves as a designer of the learning environment rather than purveyor of information and in which the constraints of time and place are alleviated to facilitate the learner's access and autonomy.
2. Technology-Mediated Learning -- Any form of instruction that uses an electronic system as a primary mode for creating the learning environment.
3. The advisory committee on distributed learning and mediated instruction shall be appointed by the commissioner and consist of representatives from the system campuses, the community colleges, and the commissioner's office. It will report to the academic and student affairs committee of the board through the council of academic officers and will be chaired by the distributed learning coordinator. The advisory committee will advise the commissioner and the system on policy and procedures related to distributed learning and on acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery and/or learning systems, and will assist in resolving concerns that might arise between the campuses.

III. Mission

A. In accordance with regents' policy, each campus of the MUS shall have an approved mission statement on file with the office of commissioner of higher education.

B. All programs and courses offered by the respective campuses of the MUS shall be consistent with the approved campus mission statement.

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III. Reporting Procedures

A. By July 1 of every year, each institution shall file with the commissioner an annual report of its distributed learning activity over the preceding twelve months. The distributed learning coordinator will provide guidelines for the format and content of this report and will publish an aggregated report on the worldwide web for public access.

B. For credit courses only, by April 15 for autumn semester, November 1 for spring semester, and March 1 for summer session of each fiscal year, each campus will file, with the distributed learning coordinator, a list of credit courses being offered via distributed learning methodologies according to the following criteria:

1. course number
2. course name
3. number of credits
4. term
5. medium(s) of delivery
6. site (where applicable).

C. For incidental courses where such a schedule is not practical, the campus will notify the coordinator and other campuses prior to advertising the offering. The distributed learning coordinator will publish a list of distributed learning courses on the MUS worldwide web for public access.

D. The distributed learning coordinator shall, with the assistance of the advisory committee, resolve scheduling conflicts among institutions concerning course and program delivery. Institutions may appeal such decisions to the commissioner.

E. Campuses considering the acquisition of large-scale interactive delivery systems and/or learning systems to support technology-mediated learning for remote audiences should strive to select systems that are compatible with existing technology and must submit proposals to the distributed learning coordinator for review by the advisory committee prior to implementation.

IV. Standards and Conditions

A. Faculty

1. Instructors responsible for credit courses offered through distributed learning methodologies must meet the standards used by the institution for the appointment of faculty including review and approval at the departmental level in the fields affected and other approvals as determined by each campus.
2. Procedures for evaluation of faculty responsible for credit courses offered through distributed learning must be equivalent to those used by the academic departments.
3. Whenever distributed learning permits the enrollment of substantially greater numbers of students in a course than would normally occur, the institution must provide technical and instructional assistance sufficient to ensure that quality is maintained.
4. To support faculty who are or wish to become involved in distributed learning, the campuses should

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provide support services to assist faculty in course development and/or updating skills as needed.

B. Students

1. Students who wish to enroll in programs offered through distributed learning must satisfy the same requirements for admission to the institution, to the program of which the course is a part, and to the course itself, as would be expected of students enrolling in the same program taught in the traditional on-campus manner. Students are responsible for compliance with individual campus policies related to enrollment and degree status.
2. For students who are located at remote sites and are enrolled in distributed learning courses or programs, the credit hours earned in such courses may be accepted toward the on-campus residency requirement for graduation if a student has completed the university's regular admissions process and has been admitted to degree-seeking status within nine (9) credit hours of the original enrollment.
3. Students enrolled in distributed learning programs must be provided with academic and student support services appropriate to the program and comparable to those provided other students in like programs, including academic advising, library and computer services, and financial aid services. These may be provided by technology-mediated methods when appropriate.
4. Students who are enrolled in distributed learning courses or programs and who are located at remote sites shall be assessed fees that are directly applicable to the delivery and support of the course or program for which they are enrolled. This will include tuition, a portion of the typical mandatory fees and any special fees for the mode of delivery that have been approved by the regents.
5. Mandatory fees that are not applicable to the distributed learning program will not be assessed. At least one month prior to course or program start-up, the campus shall file notice with the commissioner's office of those fees that are applicable to students at remote sites on a course or program basis.

C. Course management and support

1. Standards and procedures for the regular evaluation of the organization and content of distributed learning courses must be equivalent to those used for resident instruction.
2. Standards for student success or failure in distributed learning courses must be as rigorous as those for traditional on-campus credit courses and communicated to the students at the beginning of the course.
3. Each course offered through distributed learning methodologies must include on-going procedures for monitoring and assessing student performance.
4. Each instructor of record in distributed learning courses must provide regular, timely feedback to students regarding their progress and performance and make him- or herself available for consultation with students as necessary.
5. Copyright and intellectual property protection
 - (a) Universities offering technology-mediated courses shall ensure compliance with all applicable copyright laws governing the use and transmission of films, videotapes, recordings, performances and other protected works as well as the reproduction of printed materials prior to the offering or transmission of the course.
 - (b) Universities offering technology-mediated courses shall ensure compliance with all laws as

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well as MUSor institutional policies relating to the protection of intellectual property prior to the offering or transmission of the course.

V. Fiscal Practices

A. State-subsidized FTE. Normally, distributed learning courses and programs will be funded by state appropriations under the approved FTE formulas in combination with a campus-resident and non-resident student tuition and approved fees as authorized by the board of regents.

1. Under the state-subsidized model, the instructor's salary and all related instructional costs may be funded from the FTE subsidy and student tuition and fees collected.
2. Extraordinary credit course fees associated with the costs of technology-mediated course delivery may be requested from the board of regents in advance, normally in May of each year.
3. Student credit hours generated under this funding arrangement (both resident and non-resident) are reported annually to the office of commissioner of higher education for inclusion in the MUS. legislative budget report.

B. Restricted enrollment model. Under special circumstances, universities may propose to offer a distributed learning degree or degree-completion program to students at remote sites on a restricted-fund or self-sustaining basis, i.e. with all funding derived exclusively from tuition and fees authorized by the board of regents from sponsoring organizations via grants or contracts, or from other non-state sources of funding.

1. Prior to advertising restricted enrollment or self-sustaining program(s), the campus will file with the distributed learning coordinator a written proposal indicating what course or program is planned, and why the self-sustaining funding is preferable.
2. Under the restricted enrollment or self-sustaining model, all salaries and course expenses must be funded from sources outside the institution's state-appropriated operating budget.
3. All student credit hours generated by technology-mediated courses and programs offered under the restricted enrollment or self-sustaining model must be reported separately from those generated under state funding and are not eligible for state subsidy.

C. In either instance (noted in 1 or 2 above), all versions of distributed learning program(s) shall be offered under the same financing plan at all sites during any single fiscal year.

History:

Item 60-004-R0788, Telecommunication Instruction Policy, November 4, 1988; as revised March 25, 1999.