

**Report to the FSU Faculty Senate
From the
FSU Distance Learning Committee
For the Academic Year 2020-2021**

The FSU Distance Learning Committee (DLC) consists of the following members (with their terms):

2013-2022: G. Stacy Sirmans, College of Business, Chair
2014-2023: Charles Hinnant, College of Information
2020-2021: Paromita Sanyal, Department of Sociology
2020-2021: Arda Vanli, Department of Industrial & Manufacturing Engineering
2020-2021: Lindsey Wharton, College of University Libraries
2018-2021: George Williamson, College of Arts and Sciences

Other Members:

Daniel Mears, Criminology and Criminal Justice, UPC Chair
Liz Jakubowski, Education, UCC Chair
David Johnson, Arts & Sciences, GPC Co-Chair
Ulla Sypher, Communication and Information, GPC Co-Chair

Ex officio Members:

Vice President for Academic Affairs or designee (TBA, Associate VP for Academic Affairs)
Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement or designee
Director, Office of Distance Learning

The Charge of the Distance Learning Committee:

The Distance Learning Committee shall provide policy development, oversight, and academic advice specific to the design and implementation of Distance Learning courses and degree programs. In particular, the committee will have the following responsibilities.

- i. To propose to the Senate procedures and standards for authorization to offer courses and programs by delivery methods other than standard classroom delivery, and for enduring quality control of such course and program offerings.
- ii. To monitor the effectiveness with which the procedures and standards and standards adopted are being implemented.
- iii. To propose to the Senate modifications to existing standards and procedures as appropriate.
This committee will supplement, not supplant, the functions of other existing committees.

Over the academic year 2020-2021 the Distance Learning Committee did not hold any formal meetings. However, through email, in the summer of 2020 the DLC developed a proposal for the partial suspension of online instruction rules for Fall Semester 2020. This proposal was passed by the Faculty Senate on August 12, 2020. The memo requesting the suspension is given below.

In general, the DLC stands ready to meet if the need arises and we will be working with the faculty senate president to set an agenda and determine discussion items for the coming year. If the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, faculty senators, faculty members at large, or others have issues that they feel should be brought before the DLC, please send them to me.

Thanks to all the members of the DLC committee for their willingness to serve.

Respectfully Submitted,

G. Stacy Sirmans

J. Harold and Barbara M. Chastain Eminent Scholar in Real Estate

To: FSU Faculty Senate Steering Committee

From: FSU Distance Learning Committee

RE: Partial Suspension of Online Instruction Rules for Fall Semester 2020

Date: July 1, 2020

Traditionally, Florida State University has had a clearly defined distance learning policy and implementation process. As a part of that process, the appropriate FSU Faculty Senate Committees have been and continue to be responsible for approval of online courses and programs offered by the university. Both undergraduate and graduate courses are subject to established university criteria after receiving approval from within the sponsoring department and/or college. Once courses are established, the faculty assume primary responsibility for exercising oversight, through their respective committees, of distance learning courses. Online courses and programs are subject to the same institutional effectiveness practices as traditional course offerings. In typical times these policies and practices have served FSU and the faculty well. However, with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we are currently operating in an environment that certainly cannot be described as typical. As the University moved from in-person instruction to remote learning (often referred to as “online” teaching) this past spring, faculty were subjected to a host of challenges as they valiantly worked to reconfigure classes to a remote-teaching structure. At the outset, the typical perception was that the university was moving to “online” teaching. This created an environment where following the traditional rules and guidelines became impractical relative to the timeline for conversion and the process became overwhelming and confusing for both faculty and administrators. As we move through the summer and into the fall semester, our already confusing and uncertain teaching environment will continue to evolve at an accelerated pace. Because of this, the FSU Distance Learning Committee (DLC) recommends a partial suspension of a portion of the **Distance Learning Policy and Process (DLPP)** manual, effective upon approval by the Faculty Senate, through the end of fall semester 2020. This suspension would be re-evaluated by the faculty and administration in fall semester 2020 for possible extension into spring 2021.

Specifically, the DLC is recommending that the following portion of the DLPP manual be suspended regarding “remote” courses (versus “online” courses):

Governance and Curriculum

The appropriate Faculty Senate Committee is responsible for approval of courses and programs offered by the university. Both undergraduate and graduate courses are subject to criteria established by the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee (FSCC) after receiving approval from within the sponsoring department and/or college. All new courses are subject to review, approval, and recommendation by either the undergraduate or graduate policy committees. The FSCC must approve all new courses. Both courses and programs, especially those offered by distance learning, must comply with the criteria established by SACSCOC.

The DLC is recommending that this review requirement be waived for fall semester 2020 for courses intended for face-to-face delivery but are temporarily offered remotely due to the current emergency situation. Essentially, this means that courses converted from in-person courses to remote courses will not be subject to approval by the appropriate university committees. Approval would rest inside each department/college. This waiver would not apply to any new courses in the fall being proposed as “online” or distance learning courses. These courses would still be subject to the usual review requirements.

For clarification, the University Registrar’s Office offers the following definitions and distinction between online courses and remote courses.

Distance learning or online courses designed and intended exclusively for online delivery. These courses often have an additional charge (distance learning fee) to offset the costs of designing and delivering the course. These costs include things that are not typically associated with traditional classroom instruction, such as instructional designers, specialized training, media production services, lab software, and teaching assistants trained to support students in an online environment.

Remote courses are courses that are traditionally offered face-to-face. This is not something we normally do or offer and these only came into existence as a result of COVID -19. We have done much smaller variations on this in response to hurricanes but nothing on this scale. FSU does not assess a distance learning fee for remote courses. Although additional expenses have been incurred to deliver these courses remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, FSU is absorbing these costs in order to prevent students from paying additional, unexpected fees for courses that would not typically have them.

The DLC recognizes that this partial suspension raises several questions and issues that should be addressed and clarified.

(1) With this partial policy suspension, it is important to make a clear distinction between distance learning (“online”) courses (which are approved by the UCC and coded as DL) and "remote" courses, which are courses intended for face-to-face delivery but are temporarily offered remotely due to the current emergency situation. For in-person courses that have moved or are moving temporarily to a remote format, the DLC recommends that they not be required to go through the normal UCC and Liberal Studies review process. Courses developed and submitted as “true” Distance Learning courses would remain subject to the normal UCC and Liberal Studies review process.

(2) The DLC would highlight the importance of carefully maintaining traditional course coding. This would minimize confusion and could help protect students that are required to have a certain number of in-person courses, such as international students. It is the DLC’s understanding that the registrar's office has made a distinction between DL and remote courses in its system.

(3) Given the health environment in March 2020, the DLC recognized that the University had no choice in going to remote teaching in the spring and summer semesters and continuing into fall semester 2020. However, the DLC would emphasize that this action is temporary, was done with implicit faculty approval, and as the health crisis subsides, expects the process to return to strict faculty control. The DLC recognizes that faculty have primary control over curriculum, including the extent to which instruction is delivered in-person in the traditional fashion versus online or remote.

(4) The DLC would remind departments/colleges, per the **Distance Learning Policy and Process** manual: “It is the responsibility of the peer review curriculum committees at department/school/college level to

determine the appropriate and academically justified number of contact hour equivalents assigned to each element of the proposed alternate delivery variant of a class.”

(5) The DLC would recommend that departments review their courses that are temporarily being taught in a remote format to ensure that they are at the usual level of rigor, engagement, etc. Also, the DLC would remind departments that all online courses, whether permanent or temporary, or formally or informally approved, must still comply with all accreditation requirements.

(6) For anyone desiring to review the **Distance Learning Policy and Process** manual, the link is:

https://odl.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu2391/files/media/PDFs/FSU%20Distance%20Learning%20Policy_April2019.pdf.

The general link to ODL is: <https://odl.fsu.edu/about-odl>.

Respectively submitted,

G. Stacy Sirmans, Chair
FSU Distance Learning Committee