

**Report to the FSU Faculty Senate  
From the  
FSU Distance Learning Committee  
For the Academic Year 2018-2019**

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

2013-2019: G. Stacy Sirmans, Business, Chair  
2014-2020: Charles Hinnant, College of Information  
2018-2021: George Williamson, History

**Other Members:**

Eric Chicken, Arts and Sciences, 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.

**The FSU Distance Learning Committee met on December 5, 2018. Two primary issues were discussed.**

- (1) The periodic review of online courses.

In summer 2018 the Faculty Senate Steering Committee decided that the Faculty Senate should review the policy of reviewing online courses every three years. As a result, the Steering Committee decided last summer to suspend the reviews of online courses for a year while the policy was being reviewed. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee asked the FSU Distance Learning Committee to take the lead in reviewing this policy. In general, the Faculty Senate Steering Committee asked the DLC to review/revise the overall distance learning policy manual and, specifically, review/revise the policy for online course review. In its spring 2018 meeting, the DLC had made some manual

revisions; however, these changes in the document were delayed until the decision for renewals was settled.

Regarding the online course review cycle, in this meeting the DLC agreed upon this revision (stated in the first full paragraph on page 7 in the ODL manual):

"The faculty, through ongoing assessment and evaluation, regularly updates courses and programs. Online courses are subject to the same institutional effectiveness practices as traditional offerings. In addition, online courses will be assessed at least once within their unit's Quality Enhancement Review cycle to ensure they meet the requisite level of quality and provide comparable quality and effectiveness to on-campus versions. In any case, all online courses must be reviewed at least once every seven years."

Also, on page 14 of the ODL manual where the review cycle length is mentioned again, the phrase "every three years" would be replaced with "every seven years."

- (2) The Committee also discussed where in the ODL manual to insert the previously-produced list of contact-hour replacement strategy examples.

The topic is mentioned in the paragraph that spans pages 4-5; it includes a footnote referencing <https://facsenate.fsu.edu/curriculum-resources>, which was one of the recommended places for including the list itself. We recommended inserting the following sentence before the first full sentence on page 5: "...for class discussion. Examples of appropriate contact hour substitutions are posted on the Curriculum Resources page. It is the responsibility....". We also discussed adding the list to other locations I mentioned in an earlier email such as [https://java.odl.fsu.edu/Curriculum\\_Request\\_Form/support.jsp](https://java.odl.fsu.edu/Curriculum_Request_Form/support.jsp) and an appropriate location on the revised ODL website.

**The FSU Distance Learning Committee met again on February 27, 2019. The primary topic of discussion was the periodic review of online courses.**

- (1) After much discussion, the DLC decided that, if there is no prohibition (such as a mandate from the BOG or elsewhere), the Committee would recommend to the faculty senate that the mandatory review for online courses be eliminated. Per this recommendation, the DLC would propose the following policy change (stated below) regarding the periodic review of online courses. With this policy change, online courses would be treated the same as face-to-face courses. It is generally felt that the development of online courses has evolved and matured such that these courses should be treated the same as in-person courses and that "in-house" review of both in-person and online courses by their respective departments should be sufficient to maintain the desired quality and effectiveness.

If this proposal is approved by the Faculty Senate, the following changes would occur in the ODL manual:

**Current policy as stated in the *Florida State University Distance Learning Policy and Process manual (latest version March 2016)***

The faculty, through ongoing assessment and evaluation, regularly updates courses and programs. Online courses are subject to the same institutional effectiveness practices as traditional offerings. In addition, online courses will be assessed at least every three years by the appropriate committee of the Faculty Senate to ensure they meet the requisite level of quality and provide comparable quality and effectiveness to on-campus versions.

**Proposed policy wording**

The faculty, through ongoing assessment and evaluation, regularly updates courses and programs. Online courses are subject to the same institutional effectiveness practices as traditional offerings. Online courses will be assessed by faculty on a continual basis to ensure they meet the requisite level of quality and provide comparable quality and effectiveness to on-campus versions.

- (2) The Committee also decided that, if review of online courses must continue, the DLC would recommend a seven-year review cycle. In this case, the DLC would need to develop a review process to handle the 900 (plus or minus) online courses at the university. It was suggested that we have a policy stated very simply accompanied by a process/schedule by which courses would be reviewed. It was indicated that the DLC has the authority to mandate that a certain number of courses (say for each department) be reviewed each year and that there is value in spreading out the reviews (institutional memory, continuity, etc.). It was also suggested that a dashboard be created and posted online to facilitate/ease the understanding of the schedule by the departments. Each course has its own renewal deadline and to avoid massive congestion, it was suggested that the courses be sorted by department, then by expiration date, then spread over 7 years (21 terms), with the understanding that some strategic staggering may be necessary.

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