

# **The University of Texas at El Paso**

## **Distance Learning and Teaching Policies**

This document outlines the responsibilities, processes, and resources for developing and offering hybrid and online courses and programs at UTEP and supersedes any previous subject matter guidelines.

The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs is responsible for the implementation and oversight of these policies. Clarifying questions can be directed to the Dean of Extended University.

### Definitions:

[Blackboard Central](#): Offers faculty technical support for Blackboard.

[Center for Faculty Leadership and Development](#): Serves as a resource to support the adoption of effective, proven, and emerging pedagogical practices.

[Center for Instructional Design](#): Provides faculty preparation programs and instructional design assistance for online, hybrid, and hyFlex courses.

Distance learning: In this document, refers to fully online and hybrid courses. Fully online courses are those for which a student does not attend on campus. Most often, these courses are taught asynchronously. Hybrid courses provide a flexible schedule where students meet for some of the class time in person and complete other portions of the course online, often asynchronously.

[Extended University](#): College-level unit that houses the Center for Instructional Design and UTEP Connect.

Learning Management System (LMS): the platform that supports course delivery, regardless of the modality. At UTEP, the LMS is Blackboard.

State authorization: the legal and regulatory process that ensures distance and other educational opportunities comply with other states' regulations, rules, and statutes.

[UTEP Connect](#): Provides support through marketing, enrollment management, advising, state authorization, and logistics to all fully online degree programs.

### Online, Hybrid, HyFlex, and Face-to-Face Courses:

Blackboard shells are created for every course appearing on the UTEP schedule. UTEP offers 100% online, minimum face-to-face, hybrid, hyFlex, and minimum technology courses and programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Students taking online, hybrid, and hyFlex courses are provided the same services available to students in face-to-face courses. These services include access to the library, financial aid, registrar, advising, technical support, and others.

Asynchronous interaction occurs when students and faculty are not required to be online at the same time. Synchronous interaction occurs when students and faculty are required to be present simultaneously using computer or video-based communication media.

Students enrolled in 100% online and minimum face-to-face courses are assessed a distance learning fee of \$75/SCH at the undergraduate level and \$100/SCH at the graduate level. These fees support the costs of online course development, delivery, and continuous improvement. These fees are subject to change per the course fee review process.

When registering for courses, students can identify the instructional method of courses on Goldmine according to the following tags:

**100% online:** Online courses are web-based with no face-to-face contact between students and faculty. Courses are supported by a learning management system (**LMS**) where instruction occurs through either asynchronous or synchronous interaction.

**Min Face-to-Face:** Minimal face-to-face courses are primarily online courses with 86 to 99% of the course work occurring online.

**HYBR:** Hybrid courses are characterized by having 50 to 85% of the course activities online with the remaining time in face-to-face classroom meetings.

**HYFL:** A course that integrates face-to-face classes with an online learning experience. HyFlex courses differ from hybrid and blended courses in that students are given the choice to attend classes face-to-face or online via video conferencing software such as Zoom or MS Teams. Faculty teach every class session face-to-face.

**Min Tech:** Face-to-face courses with 49% or less of the course delivered online. These courses are taught using traditional classroom meetings in physical locations on or off campus between students and instructors.

## **Regulatory Requirements**

### **Accreditation Demands**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) does not differentiate between standards for assessment of hybrid, hyFlex, online, and face-to-face courses. Therefore, distance learning courses must meet the same standards as an equivalent face-to-face course. If an institution cannot assure that the standards for a hybrid, hyFlex, or online course are equivalent or superior to those adopted for the same face-to-face course, the course is inappropriate for online delivery.

### **State Authorization**

UTEP is committed to complying with rules and regulations regarding the operation of higher education institutions in every state in which it enrolls students. This practice, known as State Authorization, relates to all out-of-state activities ranging from fully online programs to experiential learning placements, or internships—regardless of course

modality—and many other activities in between. For certain courses/programs, including those in professional licensure fields, additional authorizations and/or disclosures may be required. UTEP Connect will review and complete authorizations for all UTEP programs with out-of-state activities. UTEP Connect can only do this with the cooperation of all units with out-of-state activities, including those without UTEP Connect programs. See the [Extended University](#) website for more information.

#### Student Privacy

Online student privacy must be maintained at all times by keeping grades secure in the learning management system. Grades must not be viewable to other members of the course. No student grades or information may be posted outside of secured systems any time during or after the semester.

If external tools or recorded sessions are used, the faculty member must ensure that Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements are met. In most cases, it is acceptable for faculty to ask students to create and comment on public-facing platforms. However, students should not be required to post information that is protected under FERPA (class schedule, for example). Faculty comments and grades on student work should never be made public. As a solution, faculty should inform students that their work may be public and provide students with information on restricting public access to their work.

Faculty cannot require students to reveal private information to the class and should respect students' requests to not post information for class viewing. If a student requests to not share a personal photo or reveal one's identity, for example, faculty should provide an alternative assignment with similar weight.

[The Online Learning Student Privacy & Related Issues FAQ](#) provided by UT System Online Education Task Force is an excellent resource for faculty and administrators regarding maintaining student privacy.

#### Accessibility

Section 508 of the American Disabilities Act (ADA) requires instructors to provide equal access to course materials for all students. The Center for Instructional Design (CID) assists faculty in making sure their online, hybrid, and hyFlex courses are accessible to all students. Online students requiring an accommodation should work with the [Center for Accommodations and Support Services](#).

#### Intellectual Property

University rules pertaining to intellectual property can be found in Section IV, [Chapter 4](#) of the Handbook of Operating Procedures. UT System Board of Regents policies regarding intellectual property can be found in [Section 90101](#).

#### Copyright of Course Materials

The TEACH Act (Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization) provides guidance for academic institutions relative to copyright regulations. Under the TEACH Act, it may be permissible to make some copyrighted materials available to students if they are:

- directly related and integral to the course content
- accessible only by students enrolled in the course
- retained only for the duration of the class
- within the length or amount displayed in a face-to-face class.

Students should be made aware of the institution's copyright policies, specifically that course content may be subject to copyright laws and protections.

## **Academic Administration**

### **Online Course Development**

Before any course is taught online for the first time, faculty must complete the following form: [Online Course Development Agreement](#). Proposals for the conversion of existing face-to-face or hybrid courses to online must originate from the responsible faculty member and be approved by the department chair, college dean, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The proposal is then reviewed by the CID and Extended University to determine the production schedule.

When the topic of a special topics course changes, it will be treated as a new course, making it subject to the online course approval process.

Due to the time and effort involved in ensuring course quality and accessibility, faculty should allow for at least three months for development time before offering a new online course. All courses developed with the support of UTEP instructional designers will be developed under a *Joint Creation and Ownership Agreement* between UTEP and the responsible faculty member. Approximately two weeks prior to course start, a [Course Quality Rubric \(CQual\) and Technical Review](#) will be performed by CID, and feedback will be provided to the instructor. After the course review is completed, CID staff are removed from the Blackboard course shell to accommodate FERPA regulations.

### **Online Program Approval and Routing**

The process for online program approvals varies depending on whether the program already exists in the UTEP catalog.

**Conversion of existing programs** occurs when programs are included in the UTEP catalog but have not been developed for online delivery. Proposals for the conversion of an existing program to online or hybrid delivery must originate from the department chair, through the college dean, and be approved by the Provost in consultation with the Dean of Extended University. If a program requires curricular modifications, it must go through the appropriate approval process at the college and university levels. The online program financial model must be approved at all levels before course development, marketing, or recruitment begins. Program directors should also contact the Director of Academic Reports and Curriculum to facilitate notification to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board at least 90 days prior to its start date.

**New online programs** must be approved through the standard curriculum process. Once reaching final approval, notice must be sent to Extended University for

consultation and scheduling of development. The online program financial model must be approved at all levels before course development, marketing, or recruitment begins.

Please see [Curriculum Change Procedures](#) for more information.

#### Academic Calendar

Online courses adhere as closely as possible to the traditional academic calendar. Most run for 7, 8, 14, or 16 weeks in the fall and spring semesters with additional parts of term in the summer. The academic calendar is available at the [Registration and Records website](#).

### **Faculty Guidelines**

#### Online Faculty

Faculty who teach online courses are appointed and credentialed by their academic program and college/school.

#### Faculty Credentialing

Accreditation agencies require that faculty are well prepared to teach hybrid and online courses. Through CID and CFLD, UTEP provides instruction in effective hybrid and online design and teaching that meets SACSCOC accreditation standards. This training includes skill enhancement in instructional design and pedagogy, course management strategies, assessment of hybrid, hyFlex, and online course effectiveness, online course management system tools, and policies and guidelines for academic integrity. Instructors should also apply the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) [Principles of Good Practice](#) to ensure that course assessments achieve the learning outcomes.

To begin course development and be credentialed for online course instruction, faculty members must complete [The Teaching Online Academy \(TOA\)](#) which is offered online through CID. The TOA is offered multiple times a year. Additional assistance can be provided by CID as needed. Multiple workshops are also provided throughout the fall and spring semesters.

Faculty are also encouraged to enroll in the [Teaching Hybrid Academy \(THA\)](#) prior to developing and teaching a hybrid course.

For hyFlex credentialing and course development, faculty members must complete either the Teaching Online Academy (TOA) or the Teaching Hybrid Academy (THA) and the [HyFlex Academy \(HFA\)](#) prior to developing and teaching a hyFlex course.

#### Faculty Responsibility

Faculty are responsible for establishing the course learning objectives and the course curriculum, assessing the learning outcomes, providing timely responses to students, and submitting final grades.

#### Faculty Workload

Teaching a hybrid or online course accounts for the same portion of a faculty member's workload as a face-to-face course.

### Class Size

Maximum class size is determined by the academic program delivering the course; however, student demand may require maximum class size to be flexible. Depending on the department, graduate teaching assistants or coaches (via a third-party resource, Instructional Connections) may be available to assist with course responsibilities as determined by the instructor.

### Online Office Hours and Student Expectations for Response

As indicated in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures (HoOP), faculty should post a schedule of regular office hours that is convenient to students and meets departmental requirements. Faculty are expected to be available at the times indicated. A reasonable guideline for minimum office hours is 0.7 scheduled office hours per each semester credit hour for which the faculty is formally responsible. For online classes, faculty may make themselves available to students via phone, email, chat, videoconferencing tools, or other technologies.

Faculty must clearly indicate in their course materials the expectation for response to student requests. Generally speaking, faculty should respond to student emails and questions within 24 to 72 hours.

### Academic Integrity of Online Courses

Online and face-to-face courses should have the same learning outcomes, course descriptions, and expectations. Faculty should ensure that the quality and rigor of an online course is no less than that of its face-to-face equivalent.

### Course/Faculty Evaluation

Students evaluate online courses using the course evaluation procedures in effect for campus-based courses. Student evaluations are completed online for all courses. Results are made available to the instructor via [my utep](#). Additionally, faculty are encouraged to reach out to students mid-semester to gain feedback in the form of Blackboard's anonymous surveys and low-stakes discussion boards.

### Student Grade Inquiries

It is best practice to address grade inquiries via Blackboard's course messages or via Zoom web conference. To maintain student privacy, discussing grades via email or phone is not recommended.

### Student Drops and Withdrawals

Online courses follow the same regulations as face-to-face courses regarding faculty and student initiated course drops and withdrawals. Deadlines for both can be found on academic calendar on the [UTEP Registration and Records website](#).

### Faculty Compensation

Full-time faculty teaching online courses receive no additional compensation for courses taught as part of their regular load. In the case of a full-time faculty teaching the course as an overload, additional payment within university policy may be requested. Part-time faculty teaching an online class will be compensated at the same rate as a face-to-face course. Faculty developing a course for a fully online degree program may be eligible for

a course development stipend upon completion, with approval of the program director or department chair.

#### Use of Student Work

When faculty wish to use student work for any purpose outside of course or program assessment such as research or for pedagogical purposes, they must request the students' permission. To use student work used in any research-related project (professional/academic presentations, publications, posters, etc.), faculty should follow the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for human subject research including requesting that students complete an IRB approved consent form. When seeking to use student work for publication or pedagogical reasons (e.g., examples of effective projects), the [Student Authorization and Waiver for Release of Education Records for Publication of Student Authored Materials](#) form should be completed.

#### Ownership of Educational Materials

Generally speaking, materials developed using university funds and/or resources belong to the Board of Regents. The Joint Creation and Authorship Agreement, signed by the faculty member developing the course and a representative of the university, provides the faculty member with certain protections for the materials they develop.

### **Student Guidelines**

#### Student Support

Students enrolled in online courses and programs are provided access to student services available at UTEP. This includes, but is not limited to: the library, the University Writing Center, the UTEP Bookstore, the Center for Accommodations and Support Services, Career Services, and the Miner Learning Center.

Questions regarding Blackboard, UTEP email, and other technological issues can be sent to the [UTEP Helpdesk](#) via phone, email, or chat.

#### State Authorization

To comply with federal requirements regarding state authorization, UTEP must know where its students are located. All students are expected to maintain and update their current location and mailing address within UTEP's student information system.

#### Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Online students are held to the same academic integrity policies as face-to-face students. Scholastic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Faculty should take measures to deter cheating as much as possible (unique assignments, proctored exams, random test or quiz questions, plagiarism checkers, etc.). UTEP's judicial process will be followed when academic dishonesty is suspected. In this case, faculty are to collect evidence and submit it to the [Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution \(OSCCR\)](#). Faculty may not assign penalties (in the form of reduced points or grades) for inappropriate academic behavior. OSCCR will investigate the charge, determine the appropriate course of action and notify the student and faculty.



### Student Orientation

The [Blackboard Student Orientation](#) is available on the CID website for all students. Online students are strongly encouraged to access the orientation within the first semester of coursework.

### Class Attendance

Students are expected to attend their online, hybrid, or hyFlex class regularly by participating in activities such as submitting assignments, engaging in discussion boards, completing exams, attending online chats, etc. Simply logging into the course does not count as attendance.

### Other Course Providers

Online courses offered by other UT System institutions are available to students through [Finish@UT](#). To enroll in one of these courses, students must complete an online Registration Request using the Texas Information System (TIS). Students who enroll in these courses are subject to the host university's deadlines, academic calendar, tuition and fee rates, and policies, which may be different from those at UTEP.

### Online Student Complaints

UTEP's policies and procedures for handling student academic and non-academic complaints are applicable to all students, including those enrolled in distance education programs and courses. Students with complaints about distance education delivered by UTEP Connect should follow the process described in the [UTEP Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs](#) and UTEP's Handbook of Operating Procedures.

If an issue cannot be resolved internally/locally, a student may also file a complaint with the designated agency in the state where he or she is receiving instruction. A complaint may also be filed with UTEP's accrediting agency. Students located within a state with a State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) may file a complaint through the Texas SARA portal. More information including information about various state agencies can be found on the [UTEP Connect website](#).

## **Hybrid, HyFlex, and Online Course Delivery**

### Learning Management System

All hybrid and online courses must be delivered via Blackboard, the learning management system (LMS) supported by UTEP. To ensure integrity of the courses, at least 90% of the course content must reside within the LMS and be accessible only via secure login and password unique to each UTEP student and employee.

### Course Quality

In accordance with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB) [Principles of Good Practice](#) and SACSCOC accreditation standards, the academic department delivering hybrid and online courses and programs has final responsibility for ensuring pedagogical quality.

Online, hybrid, and hyFlex courses and programs may be subject to assessment and program reviews as established by UTEP's Provost Office.



### Course Delivery

To assist with student accessibility, fully online degree programs must be delivered asynchronously. Synchronous sessions maybe be scheduled, but must be recorded and remain low stakes for students who have a schedule conflict and/or reside in different time zones.

### Student Authentication

The SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement requires that “institutions demonstrate that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as 1) a secure login and pass code 2) proctored examinations and 3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.”

Students gain access to Blackboard, through which all online courses are conducted, by entering their UTEP username and password. Faculty are thus encouraged to use at least one additional process to verify that students participating in online courses are the same as the students enrolled in the course. The faculty and/or academic program should identify this process. The verification requirement must be clearly stated in the syllabus or other course documents, and according to SACSCOC, if faculty members require a student verification process that incurs a monetary charge, that information must be conveyed to students at the time of registration or enrollment (i.e., posted in a syllabus made available prior to enrollment).

Options for student verification include:

- verification of approved photo ID through a web cam
- proctoring of exams or other projects through a web cam
- synchronous or asynchronous activities requiring an approved photo ID
- field or clinical activities requiring a photo ID at arrival
- another process defined by the faculty or program

Photo IDs may include: driver's license, military ID, passport, government-issued identification, or a Miner Gold Card for on-campus students.

The CID is available to assist faculty with the selection of the verification tool and the implementation of the process.

### **Policy Review Responsibility**

Responsible parties

- Dean of Extended University
- Office of the Provost
- Faculty Senate Teaching Effectiveness Committee

Review period

- Annually on or before June 30<sup>th</sup> for an effective date of 09/01

**Resources**

[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)

[National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements](#)

[SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement](#)

[Section 508 of the Americans Disabilities Act](#)

[The TEACH Act](#)

[UTEP Extended University](#)

[UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures](#)

[UTEP Human Subject Research](#)

[UTEP Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#)

[University of Texas System Online Consortium](#)