POLICY & PROCEDURE DOCUMENT

NUMBER: 1.4040

DIVISION: Academic Affairs

TITLE: Regular and Substantive Interaction in Distance Education Courses

DATE: June 14, 2022

Authorized by: Robert Fischer, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

I. Purpose and Scope

Western Kentucky University is committed to offering quality distance education courses and programs that are student-centered and foster academic engagement. Instruction delivered via distance education may occur synchronously or asynchronously. To ensure a meaningful online educational experience, all distance education courses, including general education, must incorporate regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between students and the instructor of record. Regular and substantive interaction is a key feature that distinguishes distance education from correspondence education.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a definition for regular and substantive interaction that occurs at the course level and offer guidance on the requirements for regular and substantive interaction consistent with the Department of Education federal regulations on Distance Education and Innovation. This policy will also outline the procedure for monitoring and evaluating distance education courses to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of RSI. Failure to maintain compliance with the federal regulation could impact WKU's participation in the Title IV of the Higher Education Act, which provides financial assistance to students.

II. Policy

Instructors teaching courses considered distance education as identified in WKU Policy 1.4132 are responsible for ensuring their courses include regular and substantive interaction between the instructor of record and students. In order to comply with federal regulations requirements for online instruction in distance education, Western Kentucky University has adopted the following definitions as outlined by the U. S. Department of Education.

A. The Department of Education defines instructor as follows:

An "instructor" is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.

1. "Instructor" as defined by WKU applies to all full-time and part-time faculty who are listed as instructor of record teaching credit courses that are transcripted as WKU courses.

B. The Department of Education defines substantive interaction as follows:

"Substantive interaction" is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following—

(i)   Providing direct instruction;

(ii)   Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;

(iii)   Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;

(iv)   Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or

(v)   Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

C. The Department of Education defines regular interaction as follows:

Prior to the student's completion of a course or competency, an institution ensures "regular interaction" between a student and an instructor or instructors by —

(i)   Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and

(ii)   Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

III. Procedure

1. Including RSI in Distance Education Courses:

   a. The instructor of record will incorporate regular and substantive interaction in distance education courses in accordance with RSI requirements.

   b. The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning will provide one-on-one consultations, training and other development opportunities to instructors teaching distance education courses regarding RSI and will maintain a webpage of resources and best practices that align with RSI requirements.

2. Monitoring Process for RSI in Distance Education Courses:

   a. The instructor of record will include in their course syllabus all the various ways they intend to interact with students in their distance education course(s).

b. For each course taught during the academic year, the instructor of record will provide a self-report of RSI used in their distance education course(s) using a checklist of RSI requirements. Forms will be sent to the instructor of record each semester.

c. The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning will assist instructors with any data collection to support the attestation of RSI in their distance education course(s).

IV. Related Policies

See also:

Policy 1.4034 Engagement Requirements for Hour of Credit

Policy 1.4063 Course Syllabi

Policy 1.4132 Course Section Delivery Mode Definitions and Relationship to Distance Education

V. Reason for Revision