

Virginia State University Online Guidelines and Protocols

General – Faculty & Staff



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Virginia State University (VSU) Distance Education Overview



Distance education is a planned teaching/learning experience in which teachers and students are separated by physical distance. Teacher-student interaction occurs through multiple modalities of existing and evolving media.

Distance education requires special course design techniques, instructional techniques, assessment, and methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as unique organization and administrative arrangements.

VSU Online Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures Purpose Statement

Distance education provides learning opportunities that are not restricted by method, time, or place. It is expected that VSU online instruction meets the same quality standards as traditional face-to-face instruction. To achieve this goal, Virginia State University's distance education guidelines and operating procedures serve two purposes:

1. Provide guidelines for implementing distance education at Virginia State University.
2. Communicate quality standards for delivering and assessing fully online programs and courses.

Evaluation and curriculum of VSU distance education courses and programs take place in the context of the policies and procedures of the University and all existing academic programs.

VSU Online Mission

VSU Online implements the University's mission of preparing a diverse population of men and women through the advancement of academic programs and services that integrate instruction, research, extension, and outreach by supporting opportunities for students to enroll in online academic degree programs, certificates, and online offerings through the use of sound distance learning methodologies, tools, and operational practices.

Virginia State University's (VSU) Office of Distance Education manages the operations, infrastructure, support, and online program and course development of distance education at VSU.

State Approval and Regional Accreditation



Virginia State University has approval to offer online degree programs from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and regional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (**SACSCOC**). As a result, all accreditation policies, program development, implementation guidelines, and notifications are implemented in VSU online courses.

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

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Distance Education Definition

According to the United States Department of Education, distance education is education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include the internet, one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices, audio conference, or other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the listed technologies.

VSU Distance Education Modes of Delivery

Online instructional delivery modes require regular and substantive interaction (RSI). The U.S. Department of Education requires this for all distance education forms of delivery available at Virginia State University, including:

Asynchronous: Online Courses offered via the Internet using a Learning Management System (LMS), where instructors and students interact within the course at different times. However, there is a set schedule for learning activities and assessments.

Hybrid: Combines face-to-face classroom instruction with distance education activities. These courses blend face-to-face and online pedagogies.

Synchronous: Real-time instruction and learning activities via web conferencing allow the instructor to communicate with remote students via two-way audio/video. Instructors and students participate in class instruction live at the same time. VSU uses synchronous online courses for emergency remote instruction or as approved by the Office of Distance Education for individual situations.

Hyflex: Instructional approach that combines online and face-to-face learning, with each class session offered in-person, synchronously via web conferencing, and asynchronously. The Hyflex delivery model focuses on student flexibility for success.

Online Programs and Courses



Virginia State University offers fully online degree programs and a la carte online courses.

Fully Online Programs

Programs in which all courses are offered in the online delivery modality have to obtain internal and external approvals. Fully online programs can only be launched once all approvals are received, and program courses meet Quality Matters online course design standards through the VSU Office of Distance Education. Fully online program planning is initiated by contacting the VSU Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

- **VSU Internal Approvals** - Internal approvals include the VSU Faculty Senate through the applicable undergraduate or graduate Faculty Senate Curriculum and Instruction Committee. Additionally, approvals must be obtained from the Office of the Provost and the VSU Board of Visitors.
- **External Approvals** - Fully Online programs must obtain a modality change notification from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and submit SACSCOC Change of Delivery Modality. Any applicable programmatic accreditor approvals must be initiated before launching an online program. **Programs cannot be recruited or advertised until SCHEV approval is received.**

A la Carte Online Courses

- VSU academic programs offer a la carte courses. According to SACSCOC accreditation requirements, a face-to-face program cannot provide 50% or more of an existing program's courses online without a SACSCOC substantive change notification. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) requires a change in modality (hybrid or online) if more than 24% of a program's courses are delivered online. Additionally, SCHEV requires that programs not approved as fully online continue to offer students face-to-face options for program courses.
- All online courses should follow Quality Matters Higher Ed course design standards. Online courses are approved based on Quality Matters standards through the VSU Office of Distance Education.
 - Approval of an online course shell initiates from the department chairperson to the Office of Distance Education. The requester must provide the course link for the course to be updated.
 - The Office of Distance Education will copy the course shell into a Working shell. Development of an online course shell for approval occurs in a Working shell provided by the Office of Distance Education.
 - The approved shell is copied into the live shell for the semester.
 - **Shell approval must be submitted at least three weeks before the run term for the course.**

Virginia State University's schedule of classes, maintained by the [VSU Registrar's Office](#), indicates which courses are offered via the distance education delivery format.

A student must be enrolled in a VSU fully online program to obtain designation as an online-only student.

Faculty Online Training Requirements

Faculty members teaching online courses complete training programs and enrichment to ensure the implementation of online instruction in a pedagogically sound manner to achieve student mastery. Online courses require online instruction, course design, and instructional technology training, as online teaching proficiency requires different skills than face-to-face instruction.

Virginia State University's Office of Distance Education's online instruction approval process supports instructors in obtaining and enhancing their skills to provide exceptional online instruction. Adherence to quality standards and online-delivery trained faculty are requirements to meet accreditation standards. As a result, VSU faculty members teaching online courses must be approved to teach online via one of the listed methods:

Foundation Training for Approval

- **VSU Quality Matters Pathways Online Teaching Program** – Quality Matters (VSU Sponsored)
- **Online Learning Consortium Online Teaching Certificate** – Online Learning Consortium (No longer sponsored by VSU)
- **Introduction to Distance Education for Academics (IDEA)** – Strategic Education (No longer sponsored by VSU)
- **Online Training Exceptions**
 - Previously earned comparable in-house online teaching certificate from an accredited university or professional organization, examples Online Teaching Certificate Course – OT 101 - Adjunct World, Virginia Community College System Online Teaching Certificate, **and** completion of the Quality Matters *Designing Your Online Course Workshop* (DYOC)
 - Documentation of at least two years of online teaching experience pre-COVID-19 emergency remote instruction (March 2020).
- As with face-to-face courses, online faculty must be programmatically credentialed to teach their assigned online course(s).

Advanced Training for Enrichment and Excellence

- **Quality Matters Teaching Online Certificate (TOC program with seven workshops)** – Quality Matters (VSU Sponsored – limited offerings)
- **ACUE Excellence in Online Instruction** – Association of College and University Educators – 1-year program (VSU Sponsored – limited offerings, by announcement only)

VSU Distance Education Course Standards and Assessment

All distance education courses at Virginia State University are comparable to traditional courses and **adhere to the same learning outcomes, prerequisites, course standards, and requirements** as face-to-face sections of identical classes. Distance Education courses are designed to adhere to the aforementioned, with design elements to adapt to online delivery and best practices in online instruction. As a result, **the exact programmatic assessment requirements apply to online programs, including assessment of student learning outcomes, student satisfaction, and program productivity.**

Virginia State University is a Quality Matters University. As a result, VSU applies [Quality Matters Higher Education 6th edition online course design standards](#) in the design and delivery of online courses. The Office of Distance Education's *Online Course Development Checklist* (See [Appendix A link](#)) integrates Quality Matters Standards and additional recommended design considerations.

Regular and Substantive Interactions in Online Courses

The U.S. Department of Education requires that all online courses for which students may use Title IV funds (federal financial aid) include regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors. Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) is one of the critical elements distinguishing distance education from correspondence education and, thus, one of the central determinates for students' ability to use Title IV funds.

Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) must occur on a predictable and regular basis, should be instructor initiated focused on the course content, and there must be monitoring of students' academic engagement and intervention when appropriate.

Review the [VSU Online Faculty Success Guidelines](#) for detailed information on implementing RSI using student/teacher, student/student, and student content interactions.



Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) Dashboard Illustration, courtesy of SUNY Online

Course Load, Compensation, Ownership of Materials, and Copyright

Online Teaching

Online courses may be part of a faculty member's regular teaching load, with the same compensation rate as face-to-face courses. Online courses may also be taught as an overload at the same compensation rate as traditional courses taught as an overload.

Online Course Development

Faculty members who work with the VSU Office of Distance Education on course development for a **new fully online degree program or redevelopment of a face-to-face course for a new fully online degree program** receive a course release or compensation. The faculty member's contract timeframe during the development period or faculty status determines course release or compensation.

- On contract development – course release provided by the faculty member's department
- Off-contract development – compensation provided by the Office of Distance Education*
- Adjunct - compensation provided by the Office of Distance Education*
- 12-month faculty or faculty administrators are not eligible for course development pay.

** Compensation amounts vary by the required level of effort due to existing materials or new development.*

Online Course Ownership and Intellectual Property

VSU Office of Distance Education follows the [VSU Intellectual Property \(Copyright and Patent\) policy](#). Course shells developed for online delivery are considered works produced as part of assigned duties. As a result, the University owns developed online course shells.

Copyright

Faculty must consider copyright, trademark, and licensing when designing and developing distance education courses. Examples include copyrighted textbooks and resources, graphics, text selections, photographs, audio, and video clips. Faculty members must acquire and document permissions. If copyright permission cannot be obtained or ownership is questionable, faculty should substitute with clear copyright permission or substitute resources in the public domain or open educational resources (OER). When using Creative Commons materials, the associated Creative Commons license must be noted within the course shell.

Availability and Communication with Students and Office Hours

As Virginia State University requires, each instructor should maintain office hours weekly during each semester to accommodate student instructional or remediation needs. Online faculty should post Office Hours on their syllabus **and** within the learning management system. Online instructors may use various modes of synchronous online communication (e.g., Zoom, email, phone, Learning Management System tools, etc.).

Faculty Response Time

Instructors teaching online courses should respond to student inquiries (whether by email, phone, messaging, etc.) promptly within 24 - 48 hours.

Online Course Availability & Run Approval

The online program department chairperson is primarily responsible for overseeing the scheduling of courses offered through the department each semester and summer, including scheduling the course delivery format. Classes planned for online delivery must run using an approved online course shell. Online course shell approvals come through the VSU Office of Distance Education, where online course shells are checked periodically to confirm adherence to Quality Matters course standards. Additionally, faculty members must be approved to teach online by the Office of Distance Education. Approvals are communicated to the VSU Registrar's Office to assist with scheduling.

If a department does not have an approved faculty member to teach an online course or an approved online course shell, the department chairperson should consider offering the course when an approved online faculty member is available.

Please note that to ensure adherence to accreditation guidelines, the Office of Distance Education and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness monitor the percentage of courses a department offers. Notifications are provided to departments that may be near or out of the SCHEV or SACSCOC accreditation threshold. If a department's online courses exceed the thresholds, there will be a requirement to reduce the number of online classes running.

Tuition

Currently, all distance education courses at Virginia State University are assessed tuition based on the [University's tuition and fee schedule](#). This is subject to change.

Online Credit Hours

Virginia State University follows the [SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement](#) based on the federal definition of the credit hour. The policy also applies to distance education delivery.

Learning Management System Course Storage

Storage of VSU courses housed in the VSU Learning Management System (LMS) follows the [Library of Virginia Records Retention and Disposition Schedule GS-111's](#) guidance for course-related components. Depending on the course data or element, timeframes range from zero to five years. Using an abundance of caution, VSU retains courses for five years from semester end. The most current 2.5 years of courses are housed on the University's LMS. The previous 2.5 years of courses are stored in VSU's Data Center for retrieval if necessary. As LMS course shells move out of the 5-year time period, the University's colleges are notified of pending removal.

Distance Education Technology



Technology tools used to support VSU distance education courses are supported by VSU Technology Services. Tool issues should be reported to VSU Technology Services for resolution.

Contact Information:

Phone: 804-524-5210

[VTS ServiceNow Portal](#)

VSU Technology Services (VTS) Topics

For students

- [Student Email](#)
- [Blackboard Learn](#)
- [Banner Self Service](#)
- [Password Reset](#)
- [Getting Started with VTS](#)

For faculty/staff

- [Faculty/Staff Email](#)
- [Banner Self Service](#)
- [Banner INB](#)
- [Password Reset](#)
- [Getting Started with VTS](#)



Faculty and Students in both online and face-to-face classes can access their course shell in Blackboard.

Click the link below to access Blackboard. Use your VSU ID and password to log in:

[BLACKBOARD LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM \(LMS\)](#)

Blackboard

Need help using Blackboard? Watch the videos at the link below:

[Blackboard Tutorials](#)

[VSU Distance Education Contact Information](#)

Contact the VSU Office of Distance Education if there are questions about online instructor approval training, enrichment training, distance education resources and tools, course development, or verification of faculty online teaching approval and to obtain online course shell approval.

The department's email address is DistanceEducation@vsu.edu.

Appendix A – Important VSU Office of Distance Education Links

Important Links

[VSU Online Website](#)

[Quality Matters Higher Education 6th Edition Online Course Design Standards](#)

[Office of Distance Education Online Course Evaluation Checklist](#)

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

[SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement](#)

[VSU Intellectual Property \(Copyright and Patent\) Policy](#)

[Library of Virginia Records Retention and Disposition Schedule GS-111](#)

[VSU Tuition and Fee Schedule](#)

[VSU Registrar's Office](#)

[VTS Service Now Portal](#)