

MANSFIELD UNIVERSITY
Distance Education Strategic Plan
Revised Working Document
March 13, 2012

Mansfield University is committed to providing quality online courses and programs for both undergraduate and graduate students and to increasing the quality and number of distance education offerings. Distance education includes online, videoconference, and hybrid courses. Through a variety of University incentives, faculty members are encouraged to engage in planning, implementation, and delivery of distance education course and program offerings. The current *Mansfield University Strategic Plan* (2008 – 2013) places an emphasis on student success through quality instruction. As the University moves forward, there is recognition by the Distance Education Council (DEC), a body of the Academic Affairs Division, that the new strategic plan should more thoroughly address distance education pedagogies. At this time, the Academic Affairs Division is capturing the intent of this aspiration through provision of a quality Distance Education Strategic Plan (DESP). DEC also expects that major components of the DESP will be captured in the Mansfield University Strategic Plan 2014- 2018.

DEC Domains of Oversight Responsibilities

The DEC, comprised of faculty members and various professional staff, was formed in March 2007 and charged with identifying quality indicators for distance education delivery to undergraduate and graduate students. The DEC provides distance education instructors a forum in which to propose University policies and procedures for distance education implementation and to identify best practices in delivering quality distance education courses, videoconferencing, online pedagogy, and syllabus development. In addition, the DEC develops strategies for ensuring University compliance with federal and state requirements and accreditation expectations

Faculty Educational Support Services for Distance Education Instruction

Mansfield University provides faculty members with essential training and professional development to be successful distance education instructors. Faculty members participate in sessions that provide guidance and leadership in pedagogies of distance education instruction and present best practices in distance education delivery. [Quality Matters](#) (QM) has been selected as the primary training program for online and hybrid instructors. The faculty-centered, peer review process, moreover, was designed to certify the quality of online and blended courses. Faculty workshops are offered face-to-face as well as online.

Campus Technologies makes available resources and staff support for distance education course development and delivery. University Days, Springboard, and Computing Technology sessions provide faculty professional development opportunities to address topics, including Blogs, Wikis, YouTube, Online /Classroom, webcams, LibGuides, and numerous Web 2.0 tools (e.g., social interactive programs, Animoto, Voki, Wordle, and Prezi). Technology training in and delivery strategies for videoconference delivery also are provided to faculty.

Campus Technologies (CT) personnel provide faculty with instructions and support in using the following technology tools and programs: Turning Point Clickers, Respondus Exam Creation and Lockdown browser, Online Rooms (Elluminate/Bb Collaborate, Flip Camera, Video with PowerPoint, Uploading Video to host, eBoard resources, Ladibug Document Camera materials).

Faculty resources for D2L are located at <http://mansfield.edu/desire2learn/faculty-resources/>. Additional instructions are available on the Desire2Learn (D2L) community site, <https://community.desire2learn.com>, which is linked from the Mansfield University Campus Technologies page at <http://ct.mansfield.edu/>

Student Support Services in the Distance Education Environment

The University uses D2L as the distance education delivery system. A variety of support services (e.g., contact us form, online classrooms, widgets, and search box) are embedded within D2L. Students also are encouraged to utilize the 24/7 MU Helpdesk. Student resources, videos and printed instructions for D2L, are located at <http://mansfield.edu/desire2learn/>.

North Hall Library offers online students the same support services as campus patrons. The library provides an extensive electronic reference collection. Articles are delivered electronically to distance education students through the library's interlibrary loan and document delivery services. Student research is supported by online web pages, interactive service connections, and virtual instruction and reference. LibGuides and the webpage, [Library Resources for Online Students](#), present library resources and services available to distance education students. Librarians contribute virtually via Elluminate to online discussion boards, online chats, and student research.

Evaluation of Distance Education Delivery

MU evaluates the academic quality of its distance education programs through use of continuous improvement strategies to assess student learning. In alignment with the University-wide Assessment Plan, evaluation of distance education courses and programs is based on the identification and assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at both the course and program-level. Assessment strategies are adapted to online instructional delivery. Assessments of distance programs (e.g., School Library & Information Technologies, Art History) are recorded and monitored in *TracDat*, MU's assessment management system. Program academic accountability is ensured through a university-wide annual program review process. This process was implemented in fall 2011 and included distance education programs.

Prior to fall 2011, surveys were conducted for both online and videoconference offerings. The technology survey was discontinued when the university-wide course evaluation in online format was made available for course assessments. This form, however, does not focus on distance education delivery strategies. Therefore, a revised technology survey for online students will be developed in fall semester 2012 to assess whether online instruction captures best practices and promotes student success. Continuous Program Improvement Processes (CPIP) for distance education offerings and delivery will be utilized to identify improvement needed as indicated by the survey results, as well as assessments of program and course SLOs.

Compliance with State and Federal Regulations for Distance Education

Federal legislation (Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008) requires colleges and universities to provide students with information to assist them in making educational decisions. Distance education syllabi at Mansfield University are required to include two-click access to a reference page of inclusive compliance requirements. In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires adaptation of distance education technology to meet the educational needs of disabled students. For example, the distance education learning environment must meet [Section 508 Compliance](#) and the [World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.0). While Mansfield University has adapted its online learning environment to provide appropriate accommodations to disabled students, technological innovations necessitate continuous updating of delivery and instructional strategies.

Course syllabi also must conform to federal requirements by listing required services available to students; these services must be available to both onsite and distance education students (e.g., admissions counseling and transcript review, academic advising, and online connections to offices such as Registrar, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, Career Development, and Learning Center). To meet accreditation standards of the [Middle States Commission on Higher Education](#), all distance education syllabi contain clear connections among program level SLOs, course level SLOs, and course activities.

Authorization to Provide Distance Education

Program Integrity regulations of the [United States Department of Education](#) (USDOE, 2010) require institutions to produce certain documentation:

- authorization from states in order to “maintain eligibility for students of that state to receive federal financial aid” (Wcet Advance, 2012). Institutions have until July 2014 to receive approvals, but must show that they are pursuing approvals currently. Mansfield University is complying with this regulation by actively seeking approvals in the states in which their students legally reside. After generating reports that reflect the number of students enrolled by each state, representatives from the MU DEC are sending letters and completing state compliance applications, specifically in the states where there is the greatest number of MU online students.
- provision of the student complaint process for each state in which the institution has students. Mansfield has met the second area of compliance by providing student access to the [student complaint process](#) both at Mansfield University and in the state in which the student may reside.

Distance Education Strategic Plan Goals 2012 – 2013

As stated at the beginning of this Plan, Mansfield University is committed to providing quality distance education courses and programs for both undergraduate and graduate students and to increasing the quality and quantity of distance education offerings. Focused on this commitment, DEC has established a set of goals for the Distance Education Strategic Plan 2012-2013. For each strategic goal noted below, the DEC will identify DEC members who will develop, implement, and assess measurable action plans. These members will constitute the various Distance Education Implementation Teams (DEITs).

Goals of the Distance Education Strategic Plan 2012-2013

1. Increase and enhance DE support services for faculty and staff to gain the necessary skills and strategies for best practice delivery in distance education instruction.

Action Plans [To be developed by the DEIT]

2. Ensure quality and equitable student support services in the distance education learning environment.

Action Plans [To be developed by the DEIT]

3. Make student academic success the central focus by implementing CPIP in the distance education learning environment.

Action Plans [To be developed by the DEIT]

4. Maintain and make available to the campus community current requirements of [ADA/HEOA/USDOE](#)

Action Plans [To be developed by the DEIT]

5. Seek and achieve compliance with federal and state authorization to offer distance education courses/programs.

Action Plans [To be developed by the DEIT]

Table 1. Timeline for the 2012-2013 Strategic Plan

Date	Goals of Session
Spring 2012	DEC will review and approve the Distance Education Strategic Plan. Teams will be identified to review and design action plans. The teams will be referred to as the Distance Education Implementation Teams (DEIT).
Fall 2012	DEITs present action plans to implement DE Strategic Plan goals.
March/April 2013	DEITs report progress in completing action plans in meeting DE Strategic Plan goals.
Spring 2013	The DEC will implement and maintain a site in <i>TracDat</i> to ensure assessment and accountability.
2013 forward annually	The DEC will ensure systematic, ongoing, intentional and meaningful assessment of progress in meeting the DE Strategic Plan goals.

References

- Department of Justice. Americans with disabilities act, as amended. (2009, March 25). Retrieved from <http://www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm>
- U. S. Department of Education. (2009, March). Higher education assistive technology: Sections 504 and 508 of the rehabilitation act of 1973. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/assistivetech.html>
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