

Information for Students

1. PURPOSE and CONTEXT of MANUAL

As part of its mission to cultivate excellence in learning and teaching, Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) offers both courses and degree programs in which the majority of the instructional interaction occurs when student and instructor are separated geographically. Specific courses and programs are selected for offering through distance learning methods to provide greater access to GSW programs by providing scheduling flexibility to all potential students, but especially to adult learners with job and family responsibilities that may otherwise limit their educational opportunities. Only courses and programs for which the learning outcomes can be effectively achieved through distance learning methods are selected. This manual is intended to ensure that all GSW distance learning course and programs conform to best practices in distance education, and the policies articulated in this manual apply to all distance learning courses and programs offered by GSW.

1.1. DEFINING DISTANCE LEARNING

This university defines distance learning as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instructional interaction occurs when student and instructor are separated geographically. Such instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous, and may include the use of electronic correspondence; audio, video, or computer technologies.

1.2. DELINEATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The following groups bear specific interlocking responsibilities for distance learning at GSW.

1.2.1. Administrative Responsibilities

- To provide ongoing financial, technical, and personnel support for the development, and continuation of the distance learning program subject to budgetary constraints.
- To ensure reasonable and adequate access to a range of appropriate academic support services and resources.
- To ensure assessment of distance learning courses and programs.
- To develop processes to ensure the integrity of student work

1.2.2. Academic Unit Responsibilities

- To propose distance learning courses and programs.
- To develop and schedule of distance learning courses and programs.
- To assess distance learning courses and programs.
- To provide academic advisement to distance learning students.
- To develop processes to ensure the integrity of student work

- To apply GSW's substantive change policy when creating distance learning courses and programs

1.2.3. Information and Instructional Technology

- To provide a secure computer network ensuring the integrity and privacy of the communications and records exchanged.
- To provide technical support for distance learning instruction.
- To support and promote technological infrastructure for exclusively online programs and all other distance learning courses.

1.2.4. Faculty Responsibilities

- To be exercise control over distance learning, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction.
- To develop and design courses that utilize the advantages of the delivery medium to achieve course objectives.
- To follow GSW policy and procedure in development, scheduling, and presentation of distance learning courses.
- To design distance learning instruction that meets the same standards and criteria set for traditional campus-based courses.
- To participate in curriculum development, coordination of syllabi for courses taught by multiple instructors, and preparation of examinations, as required.
- To order any textbooks and supplementary materials that are necessary.
- To design and grade student projects, assignments, and tests in accordance with a schedule which has been communicated to students.
- To implement processes to ensure the integrity of student work.
- To provide for and maintain regular appropriate interaction with distance learning students.
- To support and adhere to the Georgia Southwestern State University Computer and Network Usage Policy and other related university policies.
- To observe copyright laws and guidelines as they pertain to the Internet, the World Wide Web, software, and the use and reproduction of materials.
- To secure copyright clearances on any copyright-protected materials used in distance learning course development.
- To participate in GSW's assessment of the distance learning.

1.2.5. Student Responsibilities

- To ascertain possession of the appropriate skills, competency levels, course prerequisites, and equipment (including browser, operating system, and software) required for the distance learning course.
- To determine that the course meets individual degree requirements.
- To assume responsibility for contacting assigned advisor/instructor.
- To complete all assigned coursework by deadlines and before the end of the semester.
- To participate in the evaluation of the course content.
- To follow all relevant university guidelines, including the student code of conduct and academic integrity policy.
- To read and adhere to Georgia Southwestern State University Computer and Network Usage Policy and other related university policies.
- To observe copyright laws and guidelines as they pertain to the Internet, the World Wide Web, software, and the use and reproduction of materials.

1.2.6. James Earl Carter Library

- To facilitate the provision of library services and resources for distance learning faculty and students.
- To encourage development of technologically advanced remote access to library resources.
- To coordinate development and provision of appropriate information technology instruction for distance learners.
- To coordinate the planning, evaluation, and improvement of library services for distance learners.
- To promote use of library resources among distance learning faculty and students.

1.2.7. Committee on Academic Affairs

- To approve the addition, revision, and deletion of undergraduate distance learning courses and programs
- To approve the conversion of existing undergraduate courses and programs to distance learning
- To monitor the assessment of general education courses delivered through distance learning

1.2.8. Committee on Graduate Affairs

- To approve the addition, revision, and deletion of graduate distance learning courses and programs
- To approve the conversion of existing graduate courses and programs to distance learning

2 GENERAL DISTANCE LEARNING POLICIES and PROCEDURES

2.1. Application of Academic Policies to Distance Learning Courses and Programs

The same policies concerning admissions requirements, academic standards, academic integrity, dropping and adding classes, repetition of courses, incomplete designations, withdrawal from a course or from the University, classification, grading, grievance procedures, credits, degree completion, and honors apply to distance learning as for campus-based classes, unless specifically stipulated otherwise (See the current Georgia Southwestern Bulletin.). The learning outcomes for distance learning courses and programs are identical to those offered on campus, although instructional strategies will necessarily differ. Faculty members apply the same standards for coursework and grading for both on-campus and distance learning courses. The academic policies that are specific to distance learning courses and programs are discussed below in section 2.5. As with on-campus courses, distance learning courses must maintain sufficient enrollment to be taught and are subject to the same course deletion policies as are all courses offered by the university.

In addition, all distance learning courses and programs at GSW must comply with the requirements, standards, and policies of both the University System of Georgia (USG), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC)

2.2. Development of Distance Learning Courses and Programs

Since distance learning courses may, and distance learning programs will require either notifying or seeking approval from both the USG and SACS-COC, developers should consult with the Office of Academic Affairs and GSW's SACS-COC Liaison before beginning to develop distance learning courses or programs.

2.2.1. Development of Distance Learning Courses

Unless the course is being developed for a completely new online program with no on-campus equivalent at GSW, all new online courses will be based on currently approved courses taught on campus. In most cases, therefore, there will be an approved course outline for both the on-campus and the distance learning version of a course.

- Distance learning courses offered at GSW must be courses developed by GSW faculty, or by professionally produced programs licensed through the Public Broadcasting System, Adult Learning Services or some other professional organization/agency and facilitated by faculty at GSW. The use of professionally produced courses must proceed through the same approval processes discussed in section 2.3.
- Since the course learning outcomes for distance learning courses must be identical to those offered on campus, development should begin with a consideration of what instructional strategies will be necessary to achieve the desired outcomes in the distance learning environment. Developers converting an existing course to distance delivery should consult the approved course outline for the on-campus version for the course to find the approved course learning outcomes.

- Developers should carefully consider how to incorporate the following best practices of distance course design into their courses.
- Each course should have an introduction that includes, if applicable, a course description, faculty contact information (Including a statement on how long students should expect to get a reply from you), required and recommended textbooks, course learning outcomes, an explanation of course organization, the grading policy, a description of all exams, descriptions of term papers/projects, directions on how to access the course schedule, research information and links to library resources, a description of netiquette, a description of academic integrity policy for the course, advice on how to succeed in an online course, links to relevant student policies for withdraw, technical requirements for the course, any downloads or plug-ins necessary for the course, technical support contact info, and a description of support for students with disabilities. This introduction should also include a welcome message from the instructor, as well as a specific section that details expectations for success in the course. The course introduction might also include exercises to ensure that students know how to use course tools.
- Developers should include a learning activity or assessment to comply with the distance learning policy discussed in section 2.5.1 of this manual.
- Each course should be well-organized with a common structure to units, if possible, and be easily navigable
- Documents and web pages in the course should have consistent appearance
- Courses need to comply with Federal Regulation 503 regarding access for students with disabilities
- Developers should create a discussion topic specifically devoted to questions, and provide a FAQ page
- Try to ensure that course can be used by all students with only a dial-up Internet connection and an out of date computer system, if possible. Sophisticated hardware or a high speed Internet connection may be required if necessary to meet the course learning outcomes, but students should be made aware of such requirements at registration.
- Course units should begin with an overview that describes the outcomes, learning activities, and assessments for the unit.
- Overviews should also connect current unit to earlier units, and make students aware of how learning activities and assessments in unit connect to course level and unit level learning outcomes.
- Developers should structure learning activities to encourage instructor to student, and student to student interactions.
- Developers should include model learning activity submissions, and rubrics that will be used to evaluate learning activities and other assessments.

- Course content should be broken into readable chunks rather than creating documents and web pages that are more than a couple of pages or screens long.
- Developers should include learning activities that take advantage of different learning styles
- Developers should include optional additional learning activities from the Internet, when possible, such as textbook websites.
- Developers should comply with fair use doctrine when adding course materials. When in doubt, leave it out (or get permission to use)!
- Ownership of distance learning courses are subject to the provisions of GSW's Intellectual Property Policy [add link when ready].

2.2.2. Development of Distance Learning Programs

Since Distance Learning Programs leading to a degree will require approval from both the USG and SACS-COC, the following considerations should be taken into account when during development:

- program description and objectives
- program's fit with institutional mission
- program justification, including need for online program in addition to on-campus program (if applicable)
- curriculum
- admissions criteria
- assistantship availability (if applicable)
- program learning outcomes
- program assessment plan
- program administration
- degree credit-hour waiver (if applicable)
- projected enrollments
- faculty inventory and workload, including faculty experience in distance learning delivery
- fiscal and facilities impact with estimated budget

2.3. Approval of Distance Learning Courses and Programs

2.3.1. Approval of Distance Learning Courses

All distance learning courses must be approved by the appropriate faculty committee: the Committee on Academic Affairs for undergraduate courses and the Committee on Graduate Affairs for graduate

courses. In addition, distance learning courses that may be taken by candidates in a teacher certification program must be approved by the Teacher Education Council. Forms for approval and more specific directions for submission may be found on [the Academic Approval Process page](#). All distance learning courses are potentially substantive changes under SACS-COC policy, and are therefore subject to GSW's substantive change policy (link policy when up). All proposals for distance learning courses must be reviewed by GSW's SACS-COC Liaison before submission to the appropriate faculty committee(s).

2.3.2. Approval of Distance Learning Programs

All distance learning programs must be approved by the appropriate faculty committee: the Committee on Academic Affairs for undergraduate courses and the Committee on Graduate Affairs for graduate courses. In addition, teacher certification programs designed for distance delivery must be approved by the Teacher Education Council. Forms for approval and more specific directions for submission may be found on [the Academic Approval Process page](#). All distance learning programs are substantive changes under SACS-COC policy, and are therefore subject to GSW's substantive change policy (link policy when up). All proposals for distance learning programs must be reviewed by GSW's SACS-COC Liaison before submission to the appropriate faculty committee(s).

2.4. Assessment of Distance Learning Courses and Programs

The cornerstone of assessment of distance learning courses and programs is learning outcomes, and therefore, assessment plans for distance learning courses and programs should be based on the same learning outcomes and outcome measures with the same results targets as those used for the same on-campus courses and programs. However, since instructional strategies used for distance delivery often differ from those used in on-campus courses and programs, the responses to assessment results may differ, as well.

2.4.1. Annual Assessment

Assessments results for distance learning courses and programs should be part of every program's annual assessment summary, including the general education program. For courses that were taught both on-campus and through distance delivery, annual assessment results must be disaggregated to ensure that outcome attainment for on-campus and distance learning courses are comparable. For programs that are offered both on-campus and through distance delivery, annual assessment results for graduates must be disaggregated to ensure that outcome attainment for on-campus and distance learning degree recipients are comparable.

2.4.2. Comprehensive Program Review (CPR)

For programs that are offered both on-campus and through distance delivery, assessment results for graduates must be disaggregated in the CPR self-study to ensure that outcome attainment for on-campus and distance learning degree recipients are comparable. The productivity, quality, and viability of both on-campus and distance learning programs must be addressed separately in both the CPR self-study and in the CPR External review report.

2.5. Academic Policies Specific to Distance Learning Courses and Programs (approved by faculty April 29, 2011)

2.5.1. Verification of Participation

Online course developers and instructors must provide a substantive means of determining participation in a course to facilitate the accurate completion of the verification roster. An assignment, such as a syllabus quiz, or the assessment from the prepackaged learning module on using the course tools in GSW's Learning Management System (LMS) provided by OIIT, must be set for each course and must be due no more than 72 hours after the drop/add period ends.

2.5.2. Access to Course for Withdrawn Students

Online instructors must monitor course rosters in Banner Web in the same way they keep track of students in traditional classes, and disable the course access of any student who withdraws themselves or is administratively withdrawn as they would keep such students from attending traditional classes. Re-enabling course access for administratively withdrawn students follows the same procedures as for students administratively withdrawn from traditional classes. A weekly check of course rosters in Banner should allow compliance with this policy.

2.5.3. Course Syllabus

Online instructors must provide a course syllabus that mirrors the syllabus used in face-to-face classes, but which highlights the difference of learning strategy inherent in the online course, and specified on the online version of the course outline. For instance, it must be clear to a student how they will get answers to questions they would normally pose during a class meeting, or how substantive participation in the online class will be measured and assessed.

2.5.4. Verification of Identity

Online course developers and instructors must demonstrate that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education 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 instructor, 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.

2.6. Distance Learning Legal Policies

2.6.1. Fair Use

Distance learning courses that involve the performance and display of audiovisual and other copyrighted works are guided by the Educational Fair Use Guidelines for Distance Learning. See the webpage of the [Copyright Advisory Office](#) at the Columbia University library for guidance on Fair Use Law. This site includes a useful [Fair Use Checklist](#). Use of copyrighted material is also governed by the University System of Georgia's [Policy on Use of Copyrighted Work in Education and Research](#).

2.6.2. Intellectual Property

Ownership and copyrighting of distance learning courses are subject to the provisions of GSW's Intellectual Property Policy [add link when ready].

2.7. BUDGET

Distance learning courses at the GSW are financed through the same budgeting process used for other university courses and are controlled at the department level.

3 STUDENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES AND PROGRAMS

As noted above, all policies and procedures that apply to on-campus courses and programs apply to distance learning courses and programs, as well, unless specifically stipulated otherwise.

3.1. STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All GSW students, including students in distance learning courses or programs have [rights and responsibilities](#) as outlined in the GSW Weathervane Student Handbook. In addition, all students must abide by the university's [Student Code of Conduct](#). Distance learning students may report complaints or suspected violations of the student code of conduct at GSW's [Student Problem Resolution](#) page.

3.2. STUDENT RECORDS

The University maintains students' educational records in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 as amended. The Act protects the student's privacy and allows students to challenge their educational records should they be inaccurate, misleading, or inappropriate. This protection extends to distance learning students. The handling of student records is also governed by Faculty Policy, and General University Policy. See the GSW WEATHERVANE Student Handbook for additional details describing the [confidentiality of student records](#).

3.3. MINIMUM COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS FOR USING GSW'S LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

Minimum [computer system requirements for utilizing GSW's LMS](#) may be found on the LMS web page. See also [Top Ten Tips](#) for using GSW's LMS.

3.4. APPROPRIATE USE OF COMPUTER RESOURCES

[Georgia Southwestern State University Computer and Network Usage Policy](#) constitutes the University's policy for the proper use of all Georgia Southwestern State University computing and network resources, effective protection of individual users, equitable access to, and proper management of those resources.

3.5. STUDENT TRAINING

Students enrolled in distance learning classes have the same individual responsibility for coursework as students in traditional (face to face) classes, but because of the special needs of distance learning students, some additional help is provided. FAQs, tutorials, and other information are provided [online](#). Specific course information and coping strategies may provided in syllabi or as additional course orientation material. In addition, [the Academic Skills Center](#) has resources on study skills and research and writing techniques.

3.6. ACCESS TO LIBRARY SERVICES AND OTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

Library services are provided to distance learners through a variety of means, including the library's web page, and through one-on-one contact with librarians. Distance learners can contact the library via phone, email, or use the online resources provided on the [Distance Learning Resources](#) section located on the library's homepage. More detailed information is made available through the [library web page](#), which is publicized to the distance learning faculty and students. Additional information about conducting library research at a distance, requesting materials through interlibrary loan, borrowing privileges, etc. may be obtained by contacting Access Services, 229-931-2266, or calling the James Earl Carter Library Reference Librarian at 229- 931-2259. Remote access is provided to the web-based online catalog (Gil-Find) for books and to numerous licensed databases via GALILEO. Interlibrary loan requests can be emailed to libill@gsw.edu. The Library provides an online tutorial that provides information on conducting research, Gil-Find, and Galileo.

3.7. MATERIALS DELIVERY

Course material is available through GSW's Learning Management System (LMS). Student must log into the LMS using their unique account to have access to their distance learning courses. Information on how to login to the LMS is provided on the [GSW GaVIEW website](#). Other materials need for distance learning courses can be obtain on-line from the GSW Bookstore or through other online vendors. Required textbooks for each course are listed along with the class schedule for the upcoming term.

3.8. COMPUTER SERVICES

All GSW students, including those enrolled in distance learning classes, are assigned an email account (Radar Account). This provides e-mail capabilities, including online contact with faculty and other university personnel. Any activities conducted over a GSW account are subject to the University's policies as contained in the Office of Information and Instructional Technology's Computer & Network Usage Policy, E-mail Policy, and Web Policy as well as any state and federal law.

3.9. ADMISSION

Distance learning students are subject to the same admission requirements as traditional on-campus students. (See the GSW Bulletins.) Admission criteria help ensure that students possess the appropriate background, knowledge, and technical skills required for undertaking a particular course or program.

3.10. REGISTRATION

Registration policies and procedures are found in both the GSW Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletins and on the homepage of Registration and Academic Information Network ([RAIN](#)).

3.11. TUITION

Distance learning students enrolled in distance learning courses are regarded as on-campus students. Students enrolled in distance learning classes are subject to the same fees as on-campus students, including (if applicable) out-of-state tuition. See GSW's schedule of [Tuition and Fees](#). Students may incur addition cost if online courses and other distance education courses require proctored examinations or other forms of student identity verification.

3.12. TRANSFERABILITY

Credits for academic courses earned in distance learning courses apply to GSW degrees and are readily transferable to most other universities. See Current Bulletin for more information on [transferability](#) of courses.

3.13. ADVISEMENT

Students enrolled in distance learning courses are entitled to all student services, including advisement. Academic department chairpersons and college deans assist in the advising of distance learning students. Advisement can be conducted via email, and phone in addition to traditional face to face meetings. Contact information for advisors, chairs, and deans should be provided to students at the time of admission and registration.

3.14. COUNSELING

If a distance learning student needs individual counseling, his or her academic advisor or a member of the admission staff can direct his or her inquiries, or students may directly contact the Office of [Disability Services](#), [University Health Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), or the [Career Services](#).

3.15. FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid for distance learners is governed by the same rules and regulations as for on-campus students. For more information, see the GSW Bulletins or the [Financial Aid](#) webpage.

3.16. TEST PROCTORING

Some distance learning classes at GSW require proctored exams as part of the identity verification procedure for the course. Typically, the instructor will require students to take the midterm or the final exam for the course at a physical location where their identity can be verified through presentation of identification and completion of an exam under controlled conditions. Instructors facilitating these courses will often set up some exam periods on GSW's campus, or they may ask students to schedule a time with a testing proctor. Students unable to travel to GSW for testing may make arrangements to have their test proctored at another USG campus or at some other location acceptable to the instructor of the course. Students should be aware that testing centers at USG institutions charge fees of at least \$35 per test for proctoring. As of spring term 2013, the School of Business Administration requires proctored testing for all of its online courses through the third-party provider ProctorU. ProctorU charges \$25 to proctor a two-hour exam. Students should consult the Class Schedule in RAIN, the departmental website of the program that teaches the class, or the class syllabus for more specific information about the cost of test proctoring.

3.17. DISABILITY SERVICES

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, GSW offers reasonable accommodations to students with eligible documented learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008, a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities as compared to an average person in the population. It is the responsibility of the student to contact Office Disability Services to initiate the process to develop an accommodation plan.

This accommodation plan will not be applied retroactively. Appropriate, reasonable accommodations will be made to allow each student to meet course requirements, but no fundamental or substantial alteration of academic standards will be made. Students needing assistance should contact Office Disability Services by phone at 229-931-2661, or by e-mail at evelyn.oliver@gsw.edu. The Office of Disability Services makes available developmental services, including assistance to students with physical, learning, or psychological disabilities.

3.18. ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Academic Support Services provides online students with resources to support academic success.

The Writing Center provides online, synchronous consultation through its website: <http://gsw.edu/Academics/Academic-Resources/Academic-Skills-Center/WritingCenter/index>. Students may also request asynchronous consultations through email at writing.center@gsw.edu.

The Academic Skills Center maintains online resources with direct links to practice tests, study skills, math and computing, and writing and research: <http://gsw.edu/Academics/Academic-Resources/Academic-Skills-Center/Resources>.

The Office of Disabilities Services accommodates online students with documented disabilities. The policies and procedures for requesting accommodations can be found on the Disabilities Office website: <http://gsw.edu/Academics/Academic-Resources/Disability-Services/index>.

3.19. CAREER SERVICES

Students needing assistance with employment questions (career counseling, resume preparation, job placement, etc.) may contact Career Services by phone at 229-931-2237, or by e-mail at career@gsw.edu.