Online Education Policy

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DOCUMENT CONTENT

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Students come to SUNY Fredonia expecting a high degree of meaningful interaction with their professors and with each other. The university intends to deliver on this promise, whether in traditional courses using a lecture/discussion format, in courses delivered online, or, as is becoming increasingly common, in web-enhanced courses in which a course management system such as ANGEL is used to supplement the traditional teaching/learning process by delivering information and providing alternate forms of communication and assessment.

Reciprocally, SUNY Fredonia has high expectations for its students. We expect them to develop into active learners, able to read, reflect, think critically, discuss, and to learn independently. Recognizing that some students will need our help to make the transition from high school to college, and that we will expect more in the way of independent learning from seniors than from freshmen, the faculty must nevertheless make its expectations clear: we expect our students to be actively engaged and to take responsibility for their education.

With this in mind, the principles that follow are intended to serve as a guide as faculty and students experiment and become increasingly proficient with the use of online technology to enhance the teaching/learning process. While these principles are relevant to distance education courses delivered synchronously and to traditional courses making limited use of online technology, they are intended to apply primarily to web-enhanced courses, hybrid /blended courses, and courses that are offered 100% asynchronously online.

1. **Academic Quality:** Courses delivered online should be as rigorous as traditional courses, and "learning objectives and outcomes should be consistent across comparable offerings1."   Students should receive adequate and timely feedback regarding their progress, and the opportunity for adequate and timely communication with the instructor (e.g., online office hours) and, where appropriate, with fellow students should be provided.

In addition, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education expects an accredited university to have:

- an ongoing program of appropriate orientation, training, and support for faculty participating in electronically delivered offerings; and
- adequate technical and physical plant facilities, including appropriate staffing and technical assistance, to support electronic offerings.2

Middle States also recommends that institutions take care to assure that students and faculty participating in distance education "have sufficient technological skills and those information literacy skills that are necessary to access and to use effectively the information resources available at a distance3."

1. **Assessment:** Online courses will be regularly assessed for effectiveness, just as traditional courses are.
2. **Mode of Instruction:** At the time of registration, students have the right to know the degree to which courses will use online technology – in particular, whether a course will be traditional, web-enhanced, hybrid/blended, or 100% online. The delivery mode for a given section of a given course may not be changed once it has been published by the Office of the Registrar.
3. **Course Frequency:** Until the university adopts an explicit policy to the contrary, undergraduates have the right to expect that any courses they are required to take be offered in a traditional or web-enhanced format according to the frequency codes published in the university catalog. Ideally, therefore, online courses should be used to supplement regular offerings. This may be done, for example, by offering courses online during the summer or during the J-term. Or, for example, a course with a B frequency code that is traditionally offered every fall semester might occasionally be offered online in the spring semester. Such practices would, it is hoped, provide a win-win situation: faculty would have the opportunity to develop and gain experience with online courses, while students would be provided additional opportunities to take courses.

In exceptional cases, a department may find it desirable to offer a certain course online in a manner that does not supplement the existing frequency code. This might happen, for example, if a department proposes to make one of its degree programs available online. In such a case, a schedule for online vs. traditional offerings of the course should be developed and made available to students in a timely manner, so that students have the opportunity, as much as possible, to plan to take the course in the format they prefer.

With regard to online degree programs, it should be noted that Middle States accreditation standards require a "demonstrated commitment to continuation of offerings for a period sufficient to enable admitted students to complete the degree … in a publicized time frame4."

1. **Academic Integrity:** Web-enhanced and online courses are expected to adhere to the same standards of academic integrity as traditional courses; refer to the SUNY Fredonia Academic Integrity Policy.
2. **Course Syllabi:** In a web-enhanced or online course, it is imperative that there be a detailed syllabus that clearly describes the course policies and expectations, as well as any special hardware or software requirements. It is also considered good practice to provide a way for prospective students to self-assess their readiness to take the course.

With respect to online courses and intellectual property rights, it is noted that this is covered by Article XI, Title J of the Policies of the Board of Trustees, and by subsequent memoranda of understanding between SUNY and United University Professions (UUP). Please refer to the UUP publication, *Intellect ual Property, Software and Distance Learning: SUNY Policy and UUP Recommendations*, for additional information.

Again, Middle States standards suggest that planning for an online course include "consideration of applicable legal and regulatory requirements," as well as "validation by faculty of any course materials or technology-based resources developed outside the institution5."

Alternative Section on Course Frequency:

The frequency with which a given course is offered should be consistent with its frequency code, as published in the university catalog. This includes instances when the course is offered in an online format.

Some students may prefer to take courses in an online format, while others may feel that their learning style is better suited to a traditional format. Therefore, it is recommended that departments supplement, to the extent possible, course frequency codes to provide information about the mode of instruction. For example, a department might indicate that a course with an A (every semester) frequency code is offered in a traditional mode in the fall semester and online in the spring semester.

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| **FAQ's** | |

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