

E.1.9.1 (Procedure) Online Learning - Definitions

Responsible Department: Vice Chancellor for Digital Learning and Transformation

Based on Board Policy: E.1.9 – Online Learning

Approved: 1-21-14

Last Amended: 11-18-25

The School for Online Learning at Alamo Colleges District has enterprise-level responsibility for unifying the vision, strategy, and facilitation of operational activities. The School is responsible for establishing and managing district-wide standards for online learning quality, consistency, and strategic direction for digital learning initiatives across the system.

The following definitions codify distance education courses and programs at all Colleges in the Alamo Colleges District in alignment with *Section 103 of the Higher Education Act, Federal Aid Title IV eligibility in 34 CFR 600.2, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Title 19 of Texas Administrative Code, Part 1 THECB, Chapter 2 Academic and Workforce Education, Subchapter J Approval of Distance Education for Public Institutions, Rule 2.202 Definitions* and each College's regional accreditor, *Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – Commission on College's Policy Statement on Distance Education*.

Alignment to THECB and Regional Accreditation

Alamo Colleges District hereby defines distance education, distance education course categories, distance education certificate and degree programs, and distance education student(s) as follows.

- I. Distance Education Definition.** The formal educational process that occurs when students and instructors are in separate physical locations (not in the same place) for the majority (more than 50 percent) of instruction. Distance education uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students. Instruction may be delivered synchronously or asynchronously.
- II. Distance Education Course.** A course in which a majority (more than 50 percent) of the instruction occurs when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. A distance education course may use 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 conferencing; or other digital media if used as part of the distance education course or program.
 - a. Distance Education Course Categories.** Two categories of distance education courses are defined:
 - i. Fully Online Course.** A distance education course in which 100-Percent of instructional activity takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations. Requirements for on-campus or in-person orientation, testing, academic support services, internships/fieldwork, or other non-instructional activities do not exclude a course from this category.
 - 1. Fully online course modalities.** A 100-percent online course may be taught in an asynchronous or synchronous modality or a combination of both in which the instructor and students are not in the same physical location.

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- a. **Asynchronous.** Instruction is available for students to access at a time that works best for them.
 - b. **Synchronous.** Instruction takes place in real-time and requires student presence (virtual/remote) at a set time.
 - ii. **Hybrid Course.** A distance education course in which more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of instructional activities (e.g. lecturing, assignments, assessments, etc.) takes place when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations.
 - b. The definition of distance education course does not include courses with 50 percent or less instruction when the student(s) and instructor(s) are in separate physical locations.
- III. **Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program.** A program in which a student may complete a majority (more than 50 percent) of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses. The definition of a Distance Education Degree or Certificate Program does not include programs in which 50 percent or less of the required credit hours are offered through distance education. Two categories of distance education programs are defined:
- a. **Fully Online Program.** A degree program in which students complete 100-Percent of the credit hours required for the program through fully online courses. Requirements for on-campus or in-person orientation, testing, academic support services, internships/fieldwork, or other non-instructional activities do not exclude a program from this category.
 - b. **Hybrid Program.** A degree program in which students complete more than 50 percent but less than 100 percent of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses.
 - c. **Distance Education Program Identification.** A distance education program (whether 100-Percent Online or Hybrid) is identified by each College through a process to:
 - i. confirm all courses in program can be completed taking hybrid or fully online courses; and
 - ii. commit to strategically schedule distance education courses as to allow distance education learners to complete degrees in the same anticipated time period as learners who take no distance education courses.
- IV. **Distance Education Student.** A student that completes a majority (more than 50 percent) of the credit hours required for the program through distance education courses. Fully online student is defined for clarification.
- a. **Fully online student.** A fully online student is enrolled in 100-Percent online courses (asynchronous or synchronous online) only in a given semester.