

UCLA Undergraduate Distance Education Policy

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Effective Fall 2023

INTRODUCTION

UCLA has a long tradition of teaching excellence. As changing technology creates new forms of interaction, innovative instruction methods offer new possibilities for making learning more effective, more meaningful, and more broadly accessible and equitable.

While UCLA primarily centers in-person learning, the goal of this policy is to enable the use of distance education methods as defined below when doing so will enhance the quality of education, support pedagogical effectiveness, and create opportunities for innovative instruction, in line with the Academic Senate's [Principles for the Future of Instruction](#). Hallmarks of UCLA's teaching excellence include (a) active, engaged leadership by a qualified instructor with requisite subject expertise; (b) regular, pedagogically meaningful interaction between instructor and students; and (c) means for students to periodically assess their progress toward achieving the course's learning goals.

This policy supersedes the Spring 2021 UCLA Undergraduate Fully Online Course Policy.

A. DEFINITIONS

DISTANCE EDUCATION refers to a mode of instruction in which some or all students are separated from the instructor. As with in-person courses, a distance education course must support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor. Mechanisms of instruction can include online lectures, online discussion sections or forums, online audio/videoconferencing and recorded materials, each of which can be synchronous, asynchronous or a combination of both.

The following definitions are to be used when describing courses submitted for review, and to facilitate student understanding of course expectations upon enrollment.

- **PRIMARY INSTRUCTIONAL CONTACT TIME** refers to time spent in what the registrar calls "primary" course activities (e.g., lecture, seminar) with the instructor of record. It does not include secondary sections (e.g. discussions and labs) or other activities such as office hours or examinations.
- **SECONDARY INSTRUCTIONAL CONTACT TIME** refers to time spent in what the registrar calls "secondary" course activities (e.g., discussion sections, labs).

- **INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD** refers to the primary faculty instructor of the course.
- **SYNCHRONOUS** instruction refers to simultaneous, real-time interaction between instructor and students. It may take place either in person or online via videoconferencing. Synchronous instruction necessarily involves set meeting times.
- **ASYNCHRONOUS** instruction includes use of pre-recorded lectures, written material, assignments, engagement activities, assessments, or other instruction that take place without real-time interaction. Students may engage in asynchronous course content at different times of their own choosing, but subject to an overall schedule and set of deadlines specified by the instructor.
- **IN-PERSON (Classroom-based) COURSES** are those in which 100% of instructional contact time occurs in-person, meaning that students and instructors are physically present in the same location. In-person courses require a physical classroom. Class meetings and exams occur at the times and places specified in the Schedule of Classes.
- **DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES** are those in which less than 100% of instructional contact time occurs in person. Students are sometimes physically separated from the instructor(s) during primary instructional contact time. Different types of distance education courses may be offered as outlined below:
 - a. **ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS COURSES** consist only of asynchronous instructional material (e.g. pre-recorded lectures and online discussion boards), without the option for in-person classroom attendance.
 - b. **ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS COURSES*** are courses which never meet in a classroom but which include primary instructional contact time through videoconferencing. Synchronous online courses have set meeting times that are advertised to students when they enroll. (*NOTE: Some academic units, e.g. University Extension, or self-supporting graduate degree programs, may refer to synchronous online courses as “remote.”)
 - c. **HYBRID COURSES** utilize a non-trivial combination of in-person and online primary instructional contact time. There are two types of hybrid courses:
 - 1) **HYBRID IN-PERSON**, in which 50% or more of the instructional contact time occurs in-person; and
 - 2) **HYBRID ONLINE**, in which less than 50% of instructional contact time occurs in-person. For hybrid online, students are expected to be physically present for some learning activities and/or examinations.

- d. **HY-FLEX COURSES (HYBRID-FLEXIBLE)** meet simultaneously in both online and in-person environments during the class session. Students participate synchronously online through videoconference.

NOTE: While UCLA has specific definitions for online and hybrid coursework, all academic programs must comply with requirements stipulated by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). Per WSCUC, a distance education program is defined as one in which 50% or more of the curriculum occurs in a distance education mode of delivery. Hybrid online courses are considered fully distance education courses for the purposes of determining whether a program meets the [WSCUC definition of a distance education program](#). **Departments are encouraged to consult with the [UCLA WSCUC Compliance Office](#) prior to requesting approval for distance education courses if there are concerns regarding their impact on program curriculum.**

When is Approval-for-Distance Required?

UCLA undergraduate courses in which 50% or less of primary instructional time is in-person must be Approved-for-Distance through the process detailed below in [Section B](#). This includes:

- ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS
- ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS
- HYBRID ONLINE
- HY-FLEX

Note that a class that is exactly 50% in-person, 50% distance counts as Hybrid Online and thus requires approval.

Courses with Approved-for-Distance status may also continue to be offered In-Person if previously approved as such. A course that has been approved as Online Asynchronous or Online Synchronous may be offered as Hybrid Online or Hybrid In-Person without additional approval. A course that has been approved as Hybrid Online or Hybrid In-Person or must be re-approved to be offered in Online Asynchronous or Online Synchronous format.

Special Studies courses (numbers 195-199) and courses focusing on off-campus fieldwork are automatically granted Approved-for-Distance status; they do not need to apply for it.

Distance undergraduate courses offered during Summer Sessions are subject to the policy outlined in [Section D](#) below.

Departments may authorize distance instruction in exceptional emergency circumstances as outlined in the [Appendix](#) below.

Calculating the 50% Threshold

In determining whether a given course involves 50% or more of distance education, the denominator is the total primary instructional contact time with the instructor of record that would be scheduled for an in-person version in a typical week. For example, consider a course that if offered fully in-person would meet for 150 minutes of lecture each week. A version of this class that substituted distance instruction for one of three 50-minute sessions would not require approval under this policy. But a version that substituted distance instruction for one of two 75-minute sessions would be considered Hybrid Online, and would require approval.

B. POLICIES FOR THE APPROVAL OF UNDERGRADUATE DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES

1. Course modality (In-Person, Hybrid In-Person, Hybrid Online, Online Synchronous/Asynchronous) should be accurately indicated and visible to students when they register for courses. A course cannot be changed from in-person to hybrid/online or vice-versa once students have begun registering. Secondary sections for courses approved as in-person cannot ad libitum be switched to distance modality. It is the Department's responsibility to ensure that course modalities are listed accurately in the Schedule of Classes.
2. Any course listed as Online Asynchronous/Synchronous, Hybrid Online or Hy-Flex (or any course in which 50% or more of instruction is distance-based, as defined in [Part A](#) above) must have received Approved-for-Distance status through the process specified in [Part C](#) below.
3. Instructors do not need Approved-for-Distance status to give online access (e.g., simultaneous broadcasting of a lecture via videoconference; making recorded lectures available for asynchronous viewing via BruinCast; etc.) to students who are enrolled in an in-person course but may not be physically present due to illness or other reasons. Approval is required when in-person instruction is *replaced* with distance instruction and/or for Hy-Flex format in which a subset of students in a given course are expected to receive less than 50% of instruction in person.
4. Hy-Flex courses require a plan specifying the technological and teaching support resources to ensure that students attending both online and in-person can communicate with the instructor and other students and participate fully in class.
5. Distance education courses must provide appropriate and reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities per the recommendations of the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) through an interactive process between CAE, the student and instructional staff.
6. Secondary sections for courses listed as Hybrid Online or Hy-Flex may be distance or in-person, as long as the modality is accurately conveyed to students at the time of registration. The modality of secondary sections may be set by course design or by the instructor of record, subject to departmental policy.

7. Instructors are expected to list the modality of examinations and other instructional activities accurately in the Schedule of Classes and on the syllabus, on or before the first day of instruction. In particular, students should know from the outset when they are expected to be present in-person. Online Asynchronous courses, by definition, should not include scheduled exams. Assessments for Online Asynchronous courses should be designed to build in flexibility, taking into account potential conflicts with scheduled exams.
8. Departments and other responsible units must document all distance offerings, including those authorized on an emergency basis (see [Appendix](#) below), as part of their Self-Review for Program Review.
9. Courses granted temporary FEC approval for online delivery under the 2021 Undergraduate Fully Online Course Approval Policy must be re-submitted for permanent approval under the present Distance Education Policy after the initial 3-year/3-offering period expires. Online courses granted permanent approval by UgC under the 2021 policy, and courses approved prior to 2021, do not require reapproval.
10. Approved-for-Distance courses are subject to periodic audit and re-review as dictated by the Undergraduate Council.

C. DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE APPROVAL PROCESS

In order to be scheduled as Online Asynchronous/Synchronous, Hybrid Online or Hy-Flex, a course must have Approved-for-Distance status, which is obtained through the process detailed here.

Proposals for distance education courses must include the following requirements:

1. An approved or in-progress course request form submitted via the Course Management System.
2. A course syllabus.
3. A completed [Approved-for-Distance Course Information Sheet](#), with responses to supplemental questions.
4. A formal assessment of the course or a letter of support from a campus instructional design unit, e.g., Online Teaching & Learning (OTL), the Center for Education Innovation & Learning in the Sciences (CEILS), or similar.
5. For courses requiring technological resources not currently available to all UCLA instructors, the department should obtain a letter from the appropriate teaching or administrative unit confirming that these resources will be available.

Approval Process:

1. Instructors must submit the complete proposal packet for initial approval by the Department's curriculum committee or equivalent body. If the Department (or other responsible academic unit) does not have a curriculum committee, a committee of no less than three Senate faculty (excluding the instructor proposing the course) shall be appointed to review distance course proposals.
2. Once the course is approved by the Department/Unit, the Department/Unit Chair must route the proposal packet with an approval memo to the appropriate College or School Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) for approval.
3. Following FEC approval, the FEC must submit the complete proposal packet including the Department Chair and FEC approval memos to the Undergraduate Council for notification. The Undergraduate Council delegates approval of distance education courses to FECs, subject to continued monitoring and periodic review. **NOTE: All delegated approvals by an FEC are subject to review and rescission by the Undergraduate Council.**
4. Departments and FECs should not approve a distance education course proposal unless it explicitly satisfies the following criteria:
 - a. *Instructional Engagement.* The proposal must clearly articulate feasible and appropriate strategies to promote instructional engagement.
 - b. *Evaluation of learning.* The proposal should clearly explain how student learning will be assessed and how assessments will be designed to encourage authentic work and promote academic integrity.

NOTE: Multiple-listed courses ("M" prefix) must be approved by of all participating departments through the process outlined above. Distance courses that are multiple-listed across schools require the approval of each relevant FEC.

Concurrent classes ("C" prefix) must be approved through both the Undergraduate and [Graduate Distance Education Policies](#).

To provide adequate time for review and allow for revisions, if needed, course proposals should be submitted at least six months or two quarters prior to the planned term of instruction.

D. DISTANCE INSTRUCTION IN SUMMER SESSION

Summer Session is distinct from regular academic quarters in various ways that may increase the value to students of distance learning opportunities. Students may use summers to work, travel, take internships, or engage in other valuable activities that preclude taking in-person courses. Thus, the

Undergraduate Council authorizes FECs to approve distance versions on a yearly basis of existing courses offered during Summer Session only, as specified below.

1. Departments wishing to offer existing courses in distance format during Summer Session only must submit the full roster of requested courses to their FEC for approval each year. The annual submission process will be coordinated by Summer Sessions in coordination with the FECs.
2. FECs should only approve rosters that satisfy the following conditions:
 - a. Summer distance courses must offer the **same amount of synchronous instructional contact time** as an in-person version.
 - b. Each summer distance class using online exams must state how the instructor will ensure that assessments will be designed to encourage authentic work and promote academic integrity.
3. Courses that have been Approved-for-Distance during the regular academic year may be offered in the approved format during Summer Session.

APPENDIX: GUIDANCE TO DEPARTMENTS FOR AUTHORIZING EMERGENCY DISTANCE INSTRUCTION

Departments may authorize distance instruction that was not designed for virtual delivery but is offered in distance format on a temporary basis in response to emergency conditions or other exceptional circumstances (e.g. workplace adjustments for family medical needs; instructor visa issues, etc.).

1. Whenever emergency distance instruction is authorized, the Department must report it to the Registrar's Office [via the designated form](#) so that modality is accurately reflected in the Schedule of Classes. The Department must ensure that any students enrolled in the class are promptly notified about the change in modality.

Please note:

- a. Emergency distance instruction should be synchronous wherever possible and must offer students the opportunity to ask questions and otherwise interact with the instructor and each other.
- b. Multiple-listed and concurrent classes may not use emergency distance format without explicit agreement of all departments/units involved.
- c. Departments and other responsible units must document all distance offerings, including emergency authorization, as part of their Self-Review Statement for Program Review.

2. Emergency distance instruction should be offered only for a temporary and defined period, and should not be authorized for the same instructor/course for more than a single quarter in a given academic year, unless the instructor has an approved workplace accommodation. If conditions are expected to continue for more than a quarter, the department (or other responsible unit) should pursue Approved-for-Distance status for affected courses, or offer them In Person, unless emergency changes to instructional policies have been authorized by the Academic Senate and/or campus administration.
3. Departments may grant instructors the discretion to switch up to one week's worth of in-person meetings in any course to synchronous online. Similarly, departments may grant instructors of record the discretion to allow each teaching assistant to teach in distance format for up to one week. Emergency distance meetings for more than one week must be authorized by the Department, as provided in point 1 above.
4. With departmental and instructor approval, secondary sections may be offered in distance format in emergency situations as long as the total distance instruction for the class remains below 50%. Departments are encouraged to establish a standard petition and evaluation procedure concerning the use of distance secondary sections.

NOTE: Departments have the duty to provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities, including faculty, non-faculty academic personnel, and teaching assistants. Requests for disability-related accommodations should be referred to [Employee Disability Management Services \(EDMS\)](#). Departments must notify the Registrar's Office of any courses authorized for distance instruction due to approved accommodations [via the designated form](#).