

**Distance Education
Policies, Standards, and Guidelines
K-12**

North American Division
Office of Education

Technology and Distance Education Committee
K-12

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Distance Education Policies, Standards, and Guidelines
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North American Division

Distance Education K-12

I. Philosophy

Seventh-day Adventist education is deliberate in providing a Christ-centered curriculum. The policies, standards, and guidelines for distance education courses support this premise. Distance education courses actively engage students in a manner that strengthens their relationship with Christ.

Adventist distance education is student-focused and utilizes principles of best practice. Students are engaged in active learning enabled by instructors who select a variety of appropriate teaching strategies, modes, media, and assessment.

II. Rationale

Distance education finds its place in the Adventist educational system by providing access to quality Christ-centered education, regardless of time or geographical boundaries, and by supplementing existing school programs.

III. General Policies for Distance Education Programs

1. Institutions involved in distance education programs must carefully consider learner needs, community expectations, and local financial resources.
2. Schools offering distance education programs must comply with North American Division (NAD), union, and local conference educational policies.
3. The host institution must provide adequate technology resources, physical facilities, appropriate staffing, and access to technical assistance to support its electronically-offered courses.
4. It is the responsibility of the credit-granting institution, rather than the provider, to ensure that all academic and ethical standards conform to the Adventist philosophy of education.
5. Students enrolled in distance education courses must meet the same academic prerequisites as students enrolled in face-to-face courses.
6. Credit-granting institutions must keep accurate and up-to-date records of all distance education courses offered, and all students enrolled.

7. Measures to ensure the integrity of the transcript must be in place for distance education and face-to-face courses, with no distinction in the grade reporting process.
8. Institutions offering distance education courses must be appropriately accredited or be affiliated with an appropriately accredited institution.
9. Institutions may not grant credit beyond the grade level for which they are accredited.
10. Student information, including personal data, grades, etc., must be secure.
11. Institutions offering distance education must provide an orientation required for students, parents, faculty, and on-site supervisors to ensure a successful learning experience.
12. Students, parents, and teachers must sign an acceptable use policy that addresses ethics, morals, and legal liabilities associated with online environments.

IV. Standards for Distance Education

A. Course Development

1. Courses developed shall be Christ-centered and student-focused.
2. Courses developed shall be faith-driven and mission-oriented.
For example, courses should reflect:
 - Balance and wholeness as part of a healthy lifestyle
 - Values/moral development
 - Caring, learning environment
 - Integration of Biblical principles
 - Joyful service to God and others
3. Courses developed shall focus on thinking processes.
For example, courses should reflect:
 - Mastery of foundational knowledge
 - Application of higher-order thinking processes
 - Reflection on learning processes and experiences
4. Course development design shall address the relational basis of learning.
For example, courses should reflect:
 - Interaction between learner and content
 - Interaction between learner and other learners
 - Interaction between learner and teacher
 - Interaction between learner and self (reflection)
 - Interaction between learner and the community (includes service)

- Interaction between learner and the Master Teacher
5. Courses developed shall create stimulating learning experiences.
For example, courses should reflect:
 - Instructional variety
 - Engaging design
 - Relevance to real-life experiences
 6. Courses developed shall address the individuality of learners.
For example, courses should reflect:
 - Cultural diversity
 - Learning styles
 - Multiple intelligences
 - Levels of academic performance
 7. Courses developed shall incorporate appropriate assessment processes.
For example, assessment processes should be:
 - Built on expected outcomes
 - Directly connected to course objectives
 - Varied and appropriate, including authentic assessment
 8. Courses developed shall incorporate appropriate support services and learning materials.
For example, development should address:
 - Utilizing a qualified development team
 - Access to library resources for students
 - Planning for technical support services
 - Thorough documentation including instructor's manual
 - Provision for lab kits, materials lists, textbooks, manipulatives, etc.,
 9. Courses developed shall follow the NAD curriculum guides. (It is the responsibility of the credit-granting institution to validate this alignment.)
 10. Courses developed shall provide outcomes consistent with face-to-face course offerings.
 11. Courses developed shall comply with laws pertaining to intellectual property rights.
 12. Courses developed for distance education shall be contracted in a manner that clearly states the ownership of the intellectual property.
 13. Course developers shall be guided in textbook selection by the NAD approved textbook list. (Textbooks may be optional for some courses.)

B. Technology

1. Server hardware for course engines
 - a. The technology configuration shall meet the “recommended configuration” suggested by the software publisher. It is advisable to develop the technology configuration in consultation with the software vendor. (Purchasing minimum requirement hardware may cost more due to shorter upgrade cycles.)
 - b. Fault tolerance (redundant servers, RAID hard drive arrays, uninterruptible power supplies [UPS], redundant power supplies, etc.) shall be provided for servers.
 - c. Reliable backups (tape drive) shall be in place and regularly maintained.
 - d. Servers shall be secured from internal and external vulnerability.
 - e. Institutions outsourcing application and server services shall address the following:
 - Does the vendor provide fault tolerance?
 - Does the vendor provide adequate security measures?
 - Are the services easily accessible to teachers constructing/teaching courses?
 - Will the vendor sign a service level agreement satisfactory to the institution?
 - Can the vendor grow to meet future needs of the institution?
 - Can the vendor provide performance references from current customers?
2. Client hardware (user end)
 - a. Computers and peripherals shall be able to perform the tasks required for the teacher/student to participate successfully in class.
 - b. The technology configuration shall meet the “recommended configuration” suggested by the software publisher. It is advisable to develop the technology configuration in consultation with the software vendor.
 - c. The teacher’s hardware shall incorporate appropriate levels of fault tolerance.
 - d. Client software/hardware shall be reliable in order to ensure uninterrupted participation in class.
3. Connectivity standards
 - a. The method chosen to connect to the Internet shall provide a reliable connection that is fast enough to facilitate timely downloads/uploads and connection to the server.
 - b. Bandwidth to the server shall be great enough to support the number of students enrolled in the class. (Broadband connections are recommended where available.)
 - c. Internet service provider (ISP) agreements shall be carefully negotiated and specific as to the level of service. This includes amount of connect time, space available on the server, and compensation for failure of service.
 - d. Each student involved in distance learning courses shall have individual access to a computer for instruction, as well as for completion of individual assignments and online research.

- e. Both adult supervision and appropriate filtering software shall be provided while students are online.

C. Instruction

1. Instructors shall hold denominational teaching credentials with appropriate endorsements.
2. Instructors shall have experience or specific training in distance education delivery.
3. Instruction of distance education courses shall be considered part of, not an addition to, the teacher's regular class load.
4. Instruction shall focus on developing the student's relationship with Christ.
5. Instruction shall be faith-driven and mission-oriented.
6. Instruction shall encourage mastery of foundational knowledge and independent thinking.
7. Instruction shall address the multiple aspects of relational learning.
8. Instruction shall engage students in a variety of learning experiences that are relevant to real life.
9. Instruction shall address the individuality of learners, including the diversity of culture, learning styles, multiple intelligences, and levels of academic performance.
10. Instructional processes shall include clear communication for distance education and classroom procedures.
11. Instructors shall provide students with relevant and timely feedback.
12. Instructors shall provide a variety of appropriate assessments.
13. Instruction shall include access to a variety of learning resources appropriate to the subject and mode of delivery.
14. Instructional processes shall include feedback from students, peers, and supervisors.
15. Instructors shall honor laws pertaining to copyright and intellectual property rights.

V. Guidelines For Distance Education

A. Course Development

1. Applications for development proposals for NAD-approved courses should be made to the NAD TDEC K-12 and include:
 - Names of developers and specialty designations
 - Course outline
 - Prerequisites
 - Mode of delivery (synchronous, asynchronous, mixed)
 - Technology required
 - Materials list
 - Date available
2. Courseware development teams should include:
 - Content specialists
 - Course design specialists
 - Technology specialists
3. Course developers should choose an established course-authoring software and delivery system.
4. Piloting and evaluation of courseware should be ongoing during development.
5. Course design should provide a clear and consistent format for submission of distance education course work.
6. An instructor's manual should be supplied for each course developed.

B. Technology

1. Course-authoring software selected should be user friendly and provide features necessary to support engaging design and effective instruction.
2. Courseware should provide a high quality and consistent user interface for:
 - Intuitive, effective navigation
 - Uniform, comprehensive framework
 - Access to student support links
 - Clear and concise technical instruction

C. Instruction

1. Distance education instruction should incorporate accepted best practices.
2. Instructors should avail themselves of courses and/or training that models exemplary distance learning instructional methods.

3. Distance education instruction should give special attention to:
 - Advanced planning
 - Building relationships with students
 - Development of a learning community
 - Clear procedures and expectations
 - Protocols for student and teacher interaction
 - Contingency plans for equipment failure
 - Timely feedback to students
 - On-camera performance, if applicable

D. Institutional Support

1. Comprehensive preplanning and ongoing evaluation are essential elements of a successful distance education program. The planning process should include the following:
 - Needs assessment
 - Budgetary considerations
 - Available distance education programs
 - Network infrastructure (internal and external connectivity)
 - Continuous technology renewal
 - Timelines
 - Personnel allocation
 - Related support services
 - Program evaluation with action plans
 - Planned collaboration
2. Distance education courses/programs should be selected from the North American Division Office of Education (NADOE) approved providers list.
3. A brochure describing distance learning should be made available to all participants. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) should be included.
4. Registration procedures should be clearly defined, published, and user friendly.
5. Students enrolled in off-site distance education secondary courses should be encouraged to affiliate with the nearest Adventist academy.
6. The credit-granting or host institution for off-site distance education courses should provide face-to-face registration services and orientation for students enrolled in such courses.
7. To facilitate healthy socialization, schools and distance education programs should encourage social, spiritual, and academic connections between distance education students and the participating school.

8. Prior to admitting a student to a distance education course, the institution should determine whether the student has met the prerequisites to enroll in the course, and inform the prospective student regarding:
 - Required access to technologies
 - Technical competency requirements
 - Program costs, time frame, and related policies
 - Institutional support services, online resources, and other media
 - Guidelines for interactions with the faculty and fellow students
 - Potential for increased time required for independent learning, as well as the challenges of a technology-based environment
9. Distance education course instructors should have access to necessary and appropriate student and parent information.
10. Institutions should carefully consider teacher course loads and other responsibilities in planning the assignment of distance education courses.
12. Institutions should provide training for their distance education instructors that models exemplary distance learning instructional methods.
13. Institutions should provide training and support for on-site distance education teachers and supervisors in the following areas:
 - Specific technology and software
 - Clerical
 - Resource development
 - Support materials and instructors' manuals
 - Appropriate inservice and follow-up
 - Observation and supervision
 - Coaching

VI. Glossary

Asynchronous: Asynchronous distance education is a mode of delivery that allows students to access instruction at any time. Some asynchronous courses may have a schedule for completion of course requirements.

Client hardware: The client hardware is the computer and peripherals that students and teachers use to access distance education courses.

Course engine: The course engine is the software used to develop and deliver distance education courses.

Courseware: Courseware is the course content and design delivered through a particular software platform.

Credit-granting institution: The credit-granting institution is the NAD approved institution that validates the course, awards the credit, and provides the transcript for a particular course.

Distance education: Distance education is an alternative form of instruction where teachers and students may be separated by location and/or time.

Face-to-face (f2f): Face-to-face instruction is that which occurs where students and instructors are physically present in the same classroom.

Fault tolerance: Fault tolerance is the implementation of measures to ensure uninterrupted operation of equipment and technical services required to deliver distance education courses.

Host institution: The host institution is the entity through which the distance education program is delivered to the students.

Provider: The provider is the group or organization that supplies the distance education courseware.

Server: The server is a specially equipped computer that hosts the applications that enable the delivery of distance education courses.

Synchronous: Synchronous distance education is a mode of delivery that requires students and teachers to be connected at the same time for instruction.

Upgrade cycle: The upgrade cycle is the period of time defined by an institution's technology plan during which hardware and software will be replaced with current technology.