

# ESCC Guidelines for Credit Distance Learning Offerings

## **Philosophy/Mission Statement**

Eastern Shore Community College seeks to provide distance learning opportunities for its students who are unable, for a variety of reasons, to attend classes on the college campus or who prefer the online learning environment. The distance learning opportunities at ESCC meet all quality standards set forth for traditional on-campus programs to carry out the mission of the College and to support the initiatives of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS).

The successful implementation of distance education is important to the following goals detailed in the Eastern Shore Community College Five-Year Strategic Plan - Connect, Empower, Succeed (2016-2021):

- *ESCC will identify and expand program and course offerings to address the needs of the Eastern Shore of VA.*
- *ESCC will increase student retention, completion and transfer rates. By decreasing student course scheduling conflicts, students taking distance courses may be able to graduate in a shorter elapsed time compared to relying on only physical classroom-centric courses.*
- *ESCC will identify and implement methods to assist students in meeting financial needs for education/training. By potentially decreasing the total cost of education (commute expenses, time off from employment, etc.), distance education can make an ESCC education more affordable to students.*

Effective distance learning also directly supports the VCCS Complete 2021 strategic plan of tripling the number of credentials students earn:

## **Distance Learning Opportunities at ESCC**

ESCC offers alternatives to traditional classroom-based instruction including hybrid courses; online courses through ESCC, other VCCS colleges, and the Shared Services Distance Learning (SSDL) Program in collaboration with Northern Virginia Community College.

## **Student Online Readiness**

Successful distance education students are those who are self-motivated and comfortable with independent learning. Prior to registering, it is recommended that students review this [Skills Checklist](#) (available on the ESCC website under the Academics tab->Distance Education->Skills Checklist) to see if they are prepared to participate in distance learning courses:

### *Basic Skills*

- Locate a file on hard drive, USB flash drive, and/or server
- Save a file to a specific drive and folder
- Change drives
- Connect to an ISP
- Navigate between two or more applications without closing and reopening (multi-tasking)

### *Web Browser Skills*

- Go to a specific URL
- Print a page
- Follow a hyperlink
- Conduct a basic search using a search engine

### *Email Skills*

- Use an Internet address
- Enter a message subject
- Reply to a message
- Send a message
- Open a message
- Forward a message
- Create a folder
- Save a message into a specific folder
- Delete a file
- Add a name to the address book
- Retrieve a name from the address book
- Paste text from a word processor
- Send an attachment
- Open and/or save an attachment

### *Word Processor Skills*

- Open a new file
- Open an existing file
- Save a file
- Rename (Save As) a file
- Cut, copy, and paste text
- Format text
- Change line spacing
- Print a document

In addition, students who have never taken an online class should attend an orientation to online learning offered by the college's Blackboard Administrator. This orientation is usually offered at the college in a computer lab a couple of

different times on the day before classes are scheduled to begin each semester. The Blackboard Administrator will keep a list of students who attend these sessions for record keeping purposes.

Individual classes may require additional skills beyond the minimum requirement for most online classes. It is the instructor's responsibility to inform students of these necessary skills. (A list of courses, needed technology, and needed student skill level will be available in the Distance Learning section of the ESCC website).

### **Faculty Training**

ESCC should ensure faculty who teach online have the appropriate training in pedagogy and technical requirements to deliver quality eLearning instruction. Several options exist for faculty to ensure that they are prepared to teach at a distance:

- The VCCS currently offers four courses that help to prepare faculty for the rigor of online instruction: TOP: Teaching Online Program; IDOL: Instructional Design for Online Learning; MODEL: Multimedia for Online, Distance and E-Learning; and ENROLL 2.0: Engaging Online Learners using Web 2.0 Applications.
- ESCC has an instructional technologist who can offer individualized training.
- Topics in Online Teaching and Learning (TOTAL) provides flexible, modularized training for VCCS faculty who teach blended/hybrid or online courses. Short, online learning modules (one to two weeks in length) address the most critical competencies for faculty professional development.
- Faculty may also choose to pursue related training, workshops, or course work through institutions outside of the VCCS.

### **Course Design Recommendations**

- *Student Help.* It is recommended that all courses, especially blended/hybrid and online courses include a standard Student Help area designed by the Instructional Technologist and/or Blackboard Administrator. This Student Help area will address frequently asked questions and offer troubleshooting advice for common problems associated with taking an online course.
- *Resources.* It is recommended that there be a Resources area included which provides students with downloadable resources such as software, plugins, etc. necessary for accessing course materials
- *Basic Course Template.* Course templates should be modeled after the Plan of Study required for traditionally delivered courses as noted in the *ESCC Faculty and Staff Handbook*.
- *Standard Folder.* Distant course content should be available in standard locations of the institution's course management system (CMS) as much as possible (ex. in Blackboard

Course Documents/Course Information/Assignments, etc.). This increases student “comfort” with distance courses from the institution by providing a fairly consistent interface across different distance courses (in fact all courses).

### **Procedure for offering a new course online/developing an online course**

As per the *ESCC Faculty and Staff Handbook*, “A faculty teaching load may also be adjusted by the college to take into consideration such factors as the use of instructional assistance, team teaching, the use of non-traditional instructional delivery systems, special assignments, and curriculum development. Curriculum development should be primarily for the development of a new program or new courses in a program and/or the complete revision of an existing course or program.” Thus, developing an online or hybrid version of a course may result in an adjustment to an instructor’s teaching load. Faculty who wish to develop a course or program online will work with the chief academic officer to develop an appropriate course adjustment plan.

All requirements outlined in the *ESCC Faculty and Staff Handbook* will be required for online courses, including the required Plan of Study to be kept on file in the office of the Chief Academic Officer.

### **The Plan of Study includes the following:**

1. Course name/number
2. Instructor’s name
3. Semester
4. Course Objectives
5. Course Requirements – descriptions and due dates
6. Course Regulations – participation, “attendance”, late assignments, etc.
7. Grading Scheme – how much does each assignment count
8. Topics to be covered in class
9. How students can contact you
10. Class “attendance” requirements
11. Texts – required and recommended
12. Statement on academic honesty
13. Statement that course requirements may change
14. Statement about students with disabilities

### **Virtual Office Hours**

As per the *ESCC Faculty and Staff Handbook*, an instructor may choose to offer virtual office hours in place of face-to-face office hours for online classes at the rate of 2 hours of virtual office hours per online class taught.

Virtual office hours are fixed times when the instructor is available online for students of the instructor’s courses, both distant and traditional outside of “class”. However, having very few fixed blocks of time for distant student interaction defeats one of the main advantages of distant instruction which is asynchronous interaction. For distant students (actually all students), timely responses to student inquiries is far more important than having large fixed blocks of time of which a large percentage of students may not be able to take advantage.

If extended interaction is required, the appropriate technology, such as Blackboard Collaborate or Blackboard IM, may be employed to provide the needed instruction.

### **Course Management Recommendations**

In addition to filing the Plan of Study with the appropriate dean and holding the required office hours either virtually or face to face, faculty who teach online should also:

1. Offer students an orientation within the course either online or face-to-face for each online course taught.
2. Maintain accuracy and currency of course content, instructional material and delivery technology.
3. Provide detailed student course information that clearly states student requirements.
4. Use approved course development software.
5. Adhere to copyright law.
6. Develop the course to include ample student interaction with faculty and other students.
7. Maintain weekly contact with students.
8. Provide responses to student inquiries within a reasonable time dependent upon the situation. E-mail should be responded to within 24-48 hours.
9. Have tests and other materials available and accessible to enrolled student within established due dates.
10. Have at least two proctored activities during the course of the semester to ensure student authentication. When requiring a proctored activity, the instructor of the course is responsible for proctoring.
11. Evaluate each course using the approved distance learning student evaluation instrument and following the approved ESCC Faculty Evaluation plan.

### **Course Management Considerations**

- *Faculty student interaction.* Active faculty involvement is critical to quality of distance instruction (see [principle #1](#) of *10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education*) as well as traditional instruction. It is also one of the major differences between attending college and the self-study/credential method of skills and educational attainment (AKA “canned courses”). Instructor-student interaction is critical to a positive student experience.
- *Test Proctoring.* Lack of assessment validation is one of the major criticisms of distance education. One method of addressing this issue is to have proctored assessments. The proportion of proctored assessments toward final grade should be such that a student would not have a reasonable chance of passing the course without passing at least one proctored assessment. Since proctored assessments place an additional burden on instructor, student, and possibly a third-party proctor, it is recommended having very few but major assessments proctored (ex. final exam).

If the proctor is not the instructor, the proctor should be a neutral professional familiar with college assessments (ex. other faculty, official college proctor, librarian, college counselor, or a similar neutral professional outside the college). The arrangement of

obtaining a proctor should be upon the student with guidelines set by the instructor. The instructor should retain the right for final approval of the proctor and communicate the requirements to the proctor and ensure his or her understanding of the requirements.

- *Managing expectations.* Similar to traditional courses, it is important that what the student should expect from the instructor and what the instructor expects from the student be clear from the beginning of the course. As much as possible, these expectations should be codified in the course Syllabus and/or other official documents of the course. Relevant institutional policies should be referenced in the official course documents. Of special importance with distance courses are clauses about how instruction will be provided (posting of documents, videos, etc.), needed equipment the student must have (computer hardware, software, etc.), communications protocol (email, discussions, live Web conferencing, etc.), and timing (ex. videos should be observed within 48 hours of posting, instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours, etc.).

### **Intellectual Property Rights**

Materials developed for hybrid courses and distance courses are subject to the ESCC Intellectual Property Rights Policy found in the *ESCC Faculty and Staff Handbook*.

### **Shared Services Distance Courses**

Some online courses are offered in partnership with Northern Virginia Community College through the Shared Services Distance Learning (SSDL) project. These courses are included in the fall, spring, and summer semester schedules and are noted accordingly. ESCC has a liaison in place who is the point of contact for all SSDL students. Faculty who have any questions about the SSDL or their role in supporting students enrolled in these courses should direct them to the liaison.

One of the benefits of participating in the SSDL project is that all ESCC online students, as long as ESCC participates in the SSDL project, have access to 24/7 IT Support through NOVA at <http://www.nvcc.edu/ithd/>

### **Relationship between IT and Academics**

- IT does not support student systems. Students are responsible for support of their own systems and off-campus network connections.
- Distance course faculty will communicate on-campus any instructional technology needs to IT. Since many ESCC distance students rely on on-campus technology resources, the distance course faculty must communicate these needs to IT as far in advance as possible (software installs, special systems, etc.). If possible, such needs should be included as part of the academic department Annual Unit Plan.
- IT should provide as rapid Help Desk response as possible for areas for which they are responsible. Rapid Help Desk response to distance students is important for the educational achievements of these students. If the Help Desk receives requests that are the responsibilities of the teaching faculty, the request should be forwarded as soon as possible to the responsible faculty and reply to the student that this action took place.