

Whereas WASC requires universities to ensure that every course has sufficient rigor, regardless of the delivery mode, and

Whereas UHH has in place a "credit hour" policy that is consistent with both Federal DoE and WASC Credit Hour requirements, which states that every credit hour awarded must be consistent with the amount of work needed to be expended on average for one-hour of face-to-face delivery and 2-hours of homework, regardless of the delivery mode; and

Whereas some departments and/or department chairs have voiced concerns that we currently lack a mechanism to ensure that distance learning (DL) sections require the same rigor as their face-to-face counterparts (in particular that they meet the same learning objectives), and that they adhere to the UHH Credit Hour Policy; and

Whereas many institutions have instituted the policy that they will not accept DL credits for transfer, which behooves UHH to do whatever it can to ensure that UHH DL courses will transfer, and

Whereas a procedure for ensuring adherence to these WASC requirements would be beneficial to both students and departments;

I hereby move that the UHH Faculty Congress request the VCAA to design and implement policy and procedures that assist departments in meeting WASC concerns by assuring that each DL section adheres to the rigor and credit hour requirements mentioned above. The procedures should assist departments in meeting these requirements with as little burden as possible.

Note: Given that the VCAA has in place a Distance Learning Advisory Committee, which includes as one of its charges, to "Identify and help resolve distance learning policy issues through formulation and recommendation to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs on UH Hilo Distance Learning Policies," it is assumed this request would fall to this committee, and the UHH Faculty Congress provides some suggestions below to assist the VCAA and the committee in this endeavor. We suggest that the Policy and Procedures should include something akin to:

1. A quality-checklist to be provided to every department. It is then the responsibility of each department to adopt their own procedures for ensuring that the items on the checklist are satisfied prior to authorizing a section intended to be taught as DL or a combination of face-to-face and DL (e.g. hybrid model). A sample checklist is provided in item 5 below.
2. Department Chairs will acknowledge at the time they submit their class schedules, whether the course is to be offered during the regular sessions or during the summer sessions, that the department has verified that the items on the checklist have been fulfilled for each such class. This acknowledgement, for example, could be included in the email used for schedule submission.
3. The authority responsible for finalizing the schedules (i.e. the Deans or CCECS) will notify all departments of their receipt of the acknowledgements and will keep records indicating that the procedural requirement has been satisfied.

4. This new policy and procedures will be uploaded to the Accreditation Website in order to address WASC transparency concerns.
5. The checklist would be applied to each DL (or hybrid) section offered each session, and should include in the very least, but may not be limited to, items that indicate the department has reviewed the particular proposed DL section and is confident that:
  - a. The learning outcomes for the DL section will be achieved. If the course is also taught face-to-face, these learning outcomes should essentially be identical. This is the most critical checklist item. Departments should be encouraged to closely review the syllabus, course materials, lecture notes, assignments, assessments, and scoring mechanisms to ensure they meet the required rigor and credit hour policy.
  - b. The average amount of time that a student would need to expend for each credit earned is estimated to be at least 3 hours per week during the regular sessions and an amount that would yield the same total number of hours during condensed schedules (e.g. 3hrs/wk for 15weeks = 45 hours, which implies a 6-week summer session would be 7.5 hrs/wk for 6 weeks and 11.25/wk for 4 wks). This is consistent with one hour of face-to-face and two hours of homework per week during the regular Fall and Spring sessions, as required by the UHH Credit Hour Policy.
  - c. Students enrolled in the class will have access to the instructor in a manner that is consistent with what is generally referred to as office hours. Such contact may take a variety of forms, including but not limited to regular office hours, email, voicemail, Skype (or some other technology that allows for both visual and audio communication), discussion forums, etc. It is important to ensure that students have sufficient access to the instructor and support services.
  - d. Final exams must be monitored. One of the ongoing problems with DL courses is ensuring that the work presented is that of the student enrolled. UHH is opening a testing center that allows for monitoring such exams, and it is assumed other universities also have such testing capabilities. The student enrolled in the DL course must make arrangements with a bone-fide testing center, presumably at an accredited university, that requires the student to bring a valid ID to the final exam. The VCAA should also consider other methods to ensure that all work, especially other exams, follow a similar validation process. It is assumed that such validation of the work performed is a key element of trying to ensure that DL courses transfer to other institutions.