Lander University
Faculty Online Learning Handbook

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In collaboration with the LU COIL Advisory Committee

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Overview

This document is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide to the policies and procedures that govern online learning at Lander University. The policies and procedures contained in this document comply with the requirements of the governing bodies and accrediting agencies that oversee the university and its programs.

Colleges and departments may develop additional policies and procedures for online education that are unique to their situations so long as those policies and procedures are clearly defined, judiciously applied, and aligned with the quality standards set forth in this document.
Guiding Documents
Lander University’s online learning policies and guidelines have been developed in accordance with the requirements and recommendations contained in the following documents:

- SACSCOC Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation
- SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement
- South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Guiding Principles for Distance Education
- U.S. Department of Education Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
- National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Learning
- AACSB Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation

Definitions
Lander University offers courses that are delivered in online, hybrid, and conventional formats, which are defined as follows.

Online courses
Online courses deliver all content online using our Blackboard Learning Management System as the hub of all activity. In the absence of face-to-face classroom meetings, these courses depend upon especially clear timelines, clearly defined expectations for assignments, and consistent communication from instructors to create a cohesive and manageable student experience.

Hybrid courses
Hybrid courses deliver content online and in a conventional classroom setting, devoting the time normally allotted to in-class work to online work for the equivalent of at least one class meeting per week. All time devoted to online work should have specific, clearly defined goals and measurable outcomes.

Conventional courses
All Lander University classes are supported by the Blackboard LMS and all the tools it contains. However, conventional courses rely on face-to-face meetings. They may make extensive use of online instructional tools and methods, but all such tools and methods should be used with clear and appropriate pedagogical purposes with adequate oversight, clearly defined goals, and measurable outcomes while the courses maintain their reliance on face-to-face meetings.
Policies and Procedures

Lander University Definition of Credit Hours

Lander University’s full policy on credit hours is available in The Lander Catalog and the university registrar’s web pages, but portions of the policy warrant special emphasis in the planning and oversight of online classes. Those portions are excerpted here.

Lander University adheres to the Federal definition of a credit hour for cumulative contact time per semester:

1. One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

2. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Lander University ensures a minimum of 700 minutes of instruction per credit hour (2,100 minutes of instruction for a standard, three-hour course), regardless of mode of delivery.

The expectation of contact time inside the classroom and student effort outside the classroom is the same for all formats of a course whether fully online, a hybrid of face-to-face contact with some content delivered by electronic means, lecture or seminar. Courses that have less structured classroom schedules, such as laboratories, independent studies, internships, practica, studio work, or any other academic work leading to the award of credit hours state clearly the learning objectives and expected outcomes and workload expectations that meet the standards set forth above.

Class Size

Enrollment caps for online courses are to be determined by each course’s goals and learning objectives. However, decisions regarding class size should still adhere to these basic guidelines, which are designed to ensure compliance with NC-SARA’s C-RAC “Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education.”

- Online classes should be no larger than conventional, seated versions of the same course.
- Online classes may be smaller than conventional, seated versions of the same course when learning objectives and disciplinary standards demand online teaching and assessment practices that are more labor intensive than conventional teaching methods.
- Quality online courses demand active faculty contributions to the learning environment and a level of instructor-student and student-student interaction that is equivalent to the expectations of a conventional, seated course. Course enrollment caps should be set at a level that allows these expectations to be maintained.
Attendance in Online Courses

All Lander University instructors have the freedom to establish and enforce attendance policies for their individual courses within parameters set forth by individual colleges, schools, and departments. However, all courses, regardless of discipline and delivery method, must conform to basic attendance monitoring policies followed by the university.

Lander University adheres to the attendance tracking guidelines established in Volume V of the U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid Handbook, particularly item 34 CFR 668.22(l)(7). These guidelines allow for the tracking of academically related activity as an alternative to the type of classroom attendance that is commonly associated with conventional classroom-based education.

The handbook provides these guidelines for the determination of academically related activity:

Academically related activities include but are not limited to the following:

- physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students;
- submitting an academic assignment;
- taking an exam, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction;
- attending a study group that is assigned by the school;
- participating in an online discussion about academic matters; and
- initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Academically related activities do not include activities where a student may be present but not academically engaged, such as:

- living in institutional housing,
- participating in the school’s meal plan,
- logging into an online class without active participation,
- participating in academic counseling or advisement.

Participation in academic counseling and advising are not considered to be academic attendance or attendance at an academically related activity.

In a distance education context, documenting that a student has logged into an online class is not sufficient, by itself, to demonstrate academic attendance by the student. A school must demonstrate that a student participated in class or was otherwise engaged in an academically related activity, such as by contributing to an online discussion or initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a course-related question.

Examples of acceptable evidence of academic attendance and attendance at an academically-related activity in a distance education program include:

- student submission of an academic assignment,
• student submission of an exam,
• documented student participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
• a posting by the student showing the student’s participation in an online study group that is assigned by the institution,
• a posting by the student in a discussion forum showing the student’s participation in an online discussion about academic matters, and
• an email from the student or other documentation showing that the student initiated contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course.

Identity Verification, Test Security, and Academic Integrity
Instructors of all online courses at Lander University must take appropriate steps to ensure academic integrity is maintained through the use of identity verification tools and assessment tools that are designed to prevent academic dishonesty.

Common Standards for Identity Verification
The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 requires that funded institutions use at least one of three methods for identity verification:

1. Secure login and password
2. Proctored examinations
3. Other technologies and practices (i.e. challenged-based questions, biometric analysis, etc)

This requirement is addressed in the SACSCOC standard number 4.8.1. In 2017, Lander University provided this compliance narrative in its SACSCOC Reaffirmation Report:

Lander University offers distance education and demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity using a secure login and passcode. Lander University’s existing policies and practices related to verifying the identity of a student emphasize the student’s responsibility for the security of their usernames and passwords. These policies and practices apply to all students enrolled in Lander courses and programs regardless of mode or site of delivery.

Test Security and Academic Integrity
Lander University currently offers an array of tools for the assurance of test security and academic integrity that provide a range of security and integrity options to suit the needs of various assessment situations.

• **Respondus Lockdown Browser**: Respondus Lockdown Browser is a Blackboard-integrated tool that prevents students from opening multiple browser windows during assessments.

• **Respondus Lockdown Browser with Monitor**: Respondus Lockdown Browser with Monitor is used in conjunction with the Respondus Lockdown browser. Respondus Monitor uses the student’s webcam to record the entire examination period. Any abnormal movement during the recording is flagged for instructor review. Instructors are able to review flagged moments in
addition to the entire testing session. Students can be instructed to present school id at the beginning of the testing session.

- **Turnitin:** Turnitin is a Blackboard-integrated suite of tools for writing assignments that includes plagiarism prevention and detection as well as tools for student collaboration and assessment.
- **Proctor U:** Proctor U is an online live proctoring service provided on a student-pay-per-test model. Cost averages around $20 per test. Students must schedule an appointment with Proctor U prior to taking an online examination. Students must present school issued photo id to the proctor before the testing session begins.

Course Management, Content Delivery, and Communication

All content delivery and assessment activity must take place within the learning management system for the following reasons:

- Our LMS provides a reliably uniform educational experience across all computer platforms.
- Our LMS provides an archivable record of learning activity.
- Our LMS provides a level of data and communications security that is compliant with the Federal Education Rights Protection Act.

All official communication should be carried out through an approved university tool such as Lander University e-mail or the university’s licensed Skype for Business video conferencing application.

Special Tools, Equipment, and Resources

If a course will require students to use tools, equipment, or resources that are beyond the standard requirements of the university, these requirements must be clearly stated in the course syllabus.

Adhering to Web Accessibility Guidelines

All online instructors must understand Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2 (WCAG 2), which is explained in Lander University’s Online Teacher Certification program, and design their courses to comply with those guidelines. Failing to adhere to these guidelines can have legal consequences for the university.

Student Accommodations

Students in online classes are entitled to all the same learning accommodations and support systems that are offered to students in conventional courses. All Lander University support systems, including technical support, tutoring, and wellness counseling have mechanisms for accommodating online students, and online instructors should provide clear guidance on how students can contact support services.

Roster Verification

In the opening weeks of every semester, Lander University verifies course rosters by having instructors identify students who have not attended the course since the semester began or by pinpointing a last date of attendance if a student has not returned to class after initial attendance. In addition, instructors are asked to supply the names of any students who have been attending the class who are not listed on the roster.

For the purpose of roster verification and any attendance tracking beyond this procedure that instructors choose to undertake, attendance should be assessed in terms of a record of academically
related activity. To be considered present, students must show academically related activity (as defined above) at least once per week. Simply logging into the course does not qualify as academically related activity.

**Syllabus Requirements**

Syllabi must include the following:

- [Online/Hybrid Course Disclaimer](#)
- [Inclement Weather Policy for Online Courses](#)
- Clear descriptions of class procedures including instructions on how to access course materials
- Clear explanations about any special equipment, resources, or services that students will need to acquire beyond the basic requirements of the university
- Complete calendars, descriptions, and timelines for learning activities.

**Supervision, Evaluation, and Observation**

At Lander University, the supervision and evaluation of online teaching is governed by the procedures laid out in the faculty handbook. As such, supervision and evaluation of online teaching are two distinctly different processes.

**Supervision**

All online courses at Lander University are supervised in real time by the director of the Center for Online and Innovative Learning and the university's Blackboard administrators. Courses are monitored for activity and data modification, both of which are indicators of instructor presence, engagement, and learning activity. Courses are flagged if any of these conditions are met:

- An instructor fails to log into his or her course for more than 7 consecutive days.
- The data profile of the course fails to change over the course of a 14-day period.
- The data profile of a course is abnormally small.

If any of these conditions are met, Blackboard administrators notify the director of the Center for Online and Innovative Learning, who will contact the academic officers responsible for oversight of the courses in question. Those deans and professors will be responsible for checking on course activity in the same way that they would check on the activity of instructors who have been unable to hold their regularly scheduled conventional classes.

**Evaluation**

Lander University ensures quality instruction through the faculty evaluation process as defined in the Faculty Handbook, and the evaluation of online teaching must be incorporated into those established procedures.

The online teaching of any instructor who teaches any course online during the period in which he or she is being evaluated must be included in the instructor’s review and evaluation process.

**Observation**

Individual colleges, schools, and departments may develop their own procedures, criteria, and rubrics for the observation of online teaching, but all such evaluation tools should ensure that the online teaching under observation adheres to these basic guidelines:
• Syllabi must include the following:
  o **Online/Hybrid Course Disclaimer**
  o **Inclement Weather Policy for Online Courses**
  o Clear descriptions of class procedures including instructions on how to access course materials
  o Clear explanations about any special equipment, resources, or services that students will need to acquire beyond the basic requirements of the university
  o Complete calendars, descriptions, and timelines for learning activities.

• Teaching procedures should include the following:
  o Multiple modes of content delivery
  o Clear methods for instructor-student and student-student interaction
  o Detailed schedules
  o Clear grading criteria
  o Clear descriptions of assignments and performance expectations
  o Timely and meaningful feedback on assignments
  o Instructions on accessing instructor feedback whenever feedback will be provided through assessment tools (like Turnitin) that require further explanation or guidance.

**Training Timelines**
All training courses in the Lander University Online Teaching Certification Program are grounded in established industry-standard research that suggests quality online learning should take place in a collaborative learning community. As such, all our training courses are taught on a cohort basis with defined start and end points. Cohorts will be managed on this basis:

- **Fall Semester:**
  • Early Semester Cohort
    o Approximately 8 weeks
    o Beginning of the semester to midterm
  • Late Semester Cohort
    o Approximately 8 weeks
    o Midterm to the end of the semester

- **Spring Semester:**
  • Early Semester Cohort
    o Approximately 8 weeks
    o Beginning of the semester to midterm
  • Late Semester Cohort
    o Approximately 8 weeks
    o Midterm to the end of the semester

- **Summer Semesters:**
  • Two cohorts corresponding with the two summer academic terms
Assessment of Training Effectiveness
Upon completion of training courses, all participants will be given the opportunity to complete a training effectiveness survey that has been designed to provide substantive feedback that can guide further development and refinement of the course.

Annual Recertification
To remain certified to teach online and hybrid courses after completing Advanced Core or Facilitator certification, instructors must attend at least one workshop, seminar, or related activity per calendar year on Blackboard functionality and/or online pedagogy.

- The LU Center for Online and Innovative Learning offers workshops and seminars on the third Monday and Tuesday of each month at noon and at the beginning and end of each semester. Attending any of these events will satisfy the recertification requirement
- These workshops and seminars cover a range of topics that are published on the LU COIL and ITS webpages. Topics include using the Blackboard gradebook, using Echo 360 lecture capturing, using Turnitin features, using the Repondus Lockdown Browser, and other functionalities.

Best Practices
Online teaching at Lander University should conform to the university’s Guiding Principles for Course Quality, which are provided here. Bullet points have been inserted where best practices for online courses require further elaboration.

Clear policies, expectations, and grading criteria
All course syllabi must contain all policy statements required by the university.

- Syllabi for online courses must include the university’s Online Course Disclaimer and Inclement Weather Policy for Online Courses.
- Syllabi must fully explain all classroom procedures as they will be carried out in an online format.
- Syllabi for online courses must clearly explain any special equipment, resources, or services that students will need to acquire beyond the basic requirements of the university.

All course syllabi must contain clearly articulated attendance and/or participation policies.

- Syllabi for online courses must explain that in online classes, especially for roster verification purposes, attendance and participation is determine by student login and academic activity (assignment submission, discussion participation, etc.)

All course syllabi must contain a clear explanation of the grading scale and grading policies that the instructor will use in the course.

All class assignments must be clearly and fully explained along with the grading criteria that will be used to assess student submissions.

All instructors must maintain an up-to-date gradebook in the university’s learning management system and use the learning management system as a repository for instructional materials.

Timely communication and grading
Instructors are expected to respond to student communication within 48 hours during the work week. If reasonable circumstances such as travel or emergencies prevent this, students should be notified of the delay via automated messages (such as out-of-office notices) or other similar methods.

- Students in online classes can often feel disconnected and isolated. Because of this, it is important that instructors in online classes make every effort to respond to communication within 24 hours during the work week and make every effort to inform students of changes to their communication availability.

Instructors’ communication availability during weekends and after conventional business hours should be clearly explained to students.

- Many online courses utilize assignment due dates that fall on weekends and/or outside conventional business hours to maximize student convenience. In such circumstances, it is especially important that students understand instructor communication availability and that instructors make reasonable accommodations for officially documented outages of Lander systems.

Instructors should provide grades and feedback for major assignments within a reasonable amount of time that allows students to learn from grades and feedback before completing their next major assignment or assessment.

- All course activity including content delivery and grading should take place in the learning management system to create an archivable record of learning activity and to maintain the security of student information and data in keeping with the Federal Education Rights Protection Act.

**Meaningful engagement with instructors and peers**

Content delivery should accommodate multiple learning styles and rely on more than one single delivery method.

- Content in online courses should be delivered in more than one single type of media. Courses should use a combination of reading material, audio, video, and learning activities.
- Student learning should be assessed with more than one type of assessment over the course of the semester.

Course content and delivery should be influenced and enriched by the skill, experience, and knowledge of the instructor with the understanding that while content from outside providers may deliver essential knowledge it cannot provide a complete educational experience on its own.

Social interaction, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning are important aspects of the educational experience, and while each course and each student will rely on these elements to greater or lesser degrees, all courses should provide students with the opportunity to interact with each other and learn through social interaction.
• In online courses it is especially important that instructors use some combination of discussion forums, wiki projects, and other collaboration tools to facilitate student-student interaction throughout the semester.
Appendix

Online/Hybrid Syllabus Disclaimer
Syllabi for online and hybrid courses must explain the expectations and procedures that are unique to the course delivery method. Instructors should add additional information of this sort to their syllabi, but this disclaimer should always be included.

This class is being taught as an online or hybrid course. Online and hybrid courses are much different than conventional classes and accordingly have different student requirements and expectations. Students in this course will be required to have access to functioning computer equipment, reliable Internet connections, and any additional equipment required by the course. Students will be expected to work independently and adhere to the schedules set forth in the course syllabus. Students will be expected to log into Blackboard on a consistent basis as defined by individual instructors and check their Lander University e-mail daily.

Inclement Weather Policy for Online Courses
Circumstances may arise in which inclement weather impacts online classes. If the university or course instructors experience inclement weather or natural disasters that cause power outages or technical failures that prevent work from continuing as scheduled, students will be informed of the situation and, if necessary, deadlines will be adjusted accordingly. Likewise, students may be impacted by weather events or other natural disasters that impede their ability to participate in online classes. In such circumstances, students should communicate to their instructors as soon as possible and provide evidence of the situation if instructors request it. Instructors will make reasonable accommodations up to the point that students have missed too much time or work to continue their classes. In such situations, other university support systems will intervene to help students determine their best course of action.

Guiding Principles for Course Quality
At Lander University, we believe that quality teaching, regardless of delivery format, depends upon the skill of highly qualified instructors whose courses are grounded in clear policies, expectations, and grading; timely communication and feedback; and meaningful instructor-student and student-student interaction.1

Clear policies, expectations, and grading criteria

- All course syllabi must contain all policy statements required by the university.
- All course syllabi must contain clearly articulated attendance and/or participation policies
- All course syllabi must contain a clear explanation of the grading scale and grading policies that the instructor will use in the course.
- All class assignments must be clearly and fully explained along with the grading criteria that will be used to assess student submissions.

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1 It should be understood that these guidelines are designed to apply to the vast majority of situations but that college deans and department chairs have the authority to maintain alternative guidelines and procedures when those alternatives provide more effective ways to serve their students and achieve their institutional unit goals.
All instructors must maintain an up-to-date gradebook in the university’s learning management system and use the learning management system as a repository for instructional materials.

**Timely communication and grading**

Instructors are expected to respond to student communication within 48 hours during the work week. If reasonable circumstances such as travel or emergencies prevent this, students should be notified of the delay via automated messages (such as out-of-office notices) or other similar methods.

Instructors’ communication availability during weekends and after conventional business hours should be clearly explained to students.

Instructors should provide grades and feedback for major assignments within a reasonable amount of time that allows students to learn from grades and feedback before completing their next major assignment or assessment.

**Meaningful engagement with instructors and peers**

Content delivery should accommodate multiple learning styles and rely on more than one single delivery method.

Course content and delivery should be influenced and enriched by the skill, experience, and knowledge of the instructor with the understanding that while content from outside providers may deliver essential knowledge it cannot provide a complete educational experience on its own.

Social interaction, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning are important aspects of the educational experience. While each course, instructor, and student will rely on these elements to greater or lesser degrees, all courses should provide opportunities interactive, cooperative, and collaborative learning.