

*Approved by the Faculty Senate on February 13, 2024*

## Distance Learning Policy

This policy governs the mode of instructional options offered at the American University of Central Asia, in accordance with the policy of the Ministry of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic.

### 1. General Provisions

The document outlines conditions and procedures for developing and offering hybrid and online courses and programs at the American University of Central Asia (hereinafter – the University).

The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs is responsible for the implementation and oversight of this policy.

The document has been developed in accordance with the following regulations:

- Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Education” dated August 11, 2023, No.179;
- The Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated June 26, 2014 No.354 “On Approval of Normative Legal Acts Regulating the Use of Distance Learning Technologies”;
- Internal academic rules and regulations.

### 2. Definitions

**E-course.auca.kg** is the primary platform that supports course delivery and serves as a main tool for a learning management system regardless of the mode of studies.

**[www.study.auca.kg](http://www.study.auca.kg)** is the main system for student registration and assessment of their academic performance.

**Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology 8(CTLT)** provides faculty training on Syllabus design and methodology of teaching online, hybrid or offline courses.

**Distance learning:** This term is the broad term used in Kyrgyz regulations to refer to a variety of online and / or hybrid courses.

**Online Courses:** Students do not attend classes on campus to take fully online courses; online courses are web-based and taught synchronously. Online courses are taught 80-100%

online. Some offline presence might be required for exams; face-to-face sessions are scheduled at the beginning of the semester. Online courses have synchronous and asynchronous components, defined with the course syllabus.

**Offline Courses:** Students attend classes on campus. All classes are expected to be offered on campus except for extraordinary circumstances.

**Hybrid Courses:** Designed for students to attend in person or online, depending on their needs.

**Blended Programs:** These programs are planned to utilize a combination of offline, online, and / or hybrid courses to deliver instruction throughout the program. A program where up to 70% of the instruction takes place online, and more than 20% of instruction happens in person, qualifies for blended learning programs.

When registering for courses, students can identify the format of classes in [www.study.auca.kg](http://www.study.auca.kg) according to the following tags:

**Online:** online courses are web-based classes when the instructions occur through synchronous interactions between faculty and students.

**Offline:** face-to-face classes using traditional classroom meetings on campus

Some courses will be available in hybrid mode, in which students can indicate the mode of their attendance.

### 3. Regulatory Requirements

Online or hybrid classes and programs must follow the regulatory requirements, as other course and programs:

**Accreditation:** state standards (minimum requirements) for accreditation of programs with offline and online modes of instruction are not differentiated, therefore, distance learning courses must meet the same standards.

The University is committed to complying with the state normative legal acts regulating the use of distance learning technologies and in accordance with the curricula approved by the Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic.

**Online Course Development.** Before any course is taught online for the first time, a department chair has to complete the new course approval process according to the New Course Approval Policy. Proposals for the conversion of existing in-class courses to online must originate from the responsible faculty member and be approved by the department chair and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

**Academic Calendar.** Online courses adhere as closely as possible to the regular academic

calendar.

Online, hybrid, and blended courses and programs must meet the same student learning outcomes as fully offline programs (courses).

## 4. Teaching Modes

In recognition of the diverse needs and preferences within our academic community, both faculty members and students are empowered to choose their preferred mode of teaching from the following options upon the approval of their Program Chair:

### 4.1 Synchronous Online Classes:

- Utilize live video conferencing tools to conduct real-time interactive classes.
- Facilitate direct communication between students and instructors for immediate clarification of doubts.
- Schedule regular virtual class sessions to maintain a sense of community and engagement.

### 4.2 Asynchronous Learning Modules:

- Develop comprehensive learning materials, including pre-recorded lectures, readings, and multimedia content.
- Allow students to access learning materials at their own pace, fostering flexibility for diverse schedules.
- Implement discussion forums and collaborative platforms for asynchronous communication and knowledge exchange.

### 4.3 Virtual Labs and Simulations:

- Integrate virtual laboratories and simulations to provide hands-on experience in subjects that traditionally require physical presence.
- Ensure accessibility to simulation software and virtual lab resources for practical skill development.

### 4.4 Interactive Multimedia Presentations:

- Create engaging multimedia presentations that enhance content delivery.
- Incorporate animations, videos, and interactive elements to cater to different learning styles.
- Provide accessible options for students with diverse needs.

### 4.5 Collaborative Learning Platforms:

- Foster collaboration among students through online group projects and discussions.
- Utilize collaborative tools such as Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or

other university-approved platforms.

- Encourage peer-to-peer learning and interaction.

#### 4.6 Accessible Learning Resources:

- Ensure that all learning materials and resources are accessible to students with disabilities.
- Provide alternative formats for content, such as captions for videos and transcripts for audio materials.

#### 4.7 Regular Communication Channels:

- Maintain open and regular communication channels between instructors, students, and support staff.
- Utilize email, messaging apps, and announcement boards to disseminate important information and updates.
- Stay updated on best practices in online education and incorporate new methodologies into course design.

### 5. Program guidelines

- New programs who would like to open online programs should follow the procedures for opening new programs.
- Existing programs who would like to change program modes (to move from offline online or to move from online to offline) should get the VPAA approval and notify the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees.
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### 6. Faculty guidelines

6.1. Review teaching modes definitions (include the section below).

6.2. **Course development and approval.** All new online/ hybrid courses must undergo the same course approval procedure as any other course. Course approval procedure is described here.

After approval of new online/hybrid courses, the design of the course can begin. The faculty offering or teaching the online/ hybrid course must undergo mandatory training with the CTLT on how to develop and teach the course.

6.3. Faculty of existing courses who would like to change course mode must receive approval by the program chair.

6.4. Faculty are expected to retain a copy of student work for up to one year after the course is offered.

6.5 Faculty are expected to maintain academic integrity:

6.5.1 Clearly communicate and uphold academic integrity policies in the online learning environment.

6.5.2 Report any suspected violations to the appropriate academic authorities,

6.5.3 Implement appropriate monitoring mechanisms to ensure the integrity of online assessments.

6.5.4 Encourage a culture of honesty and integrity among students.

6.6 Faculty are expected to engage in continuous improvement, assessment, & feedback:

6.6.1 Solicit feedback from students regarding the online learning experience and use it for continuous improvement.

6.6.2 Participate in course evaluations and apply insights gained to enhance future course offerings.

6.6.3 Engage in reflective practice to assess the effectiveness of instructional methods and make adjustments as needed.

6.6.4 Seek professional development opportunities to enhance online teaching skills.

6.6.6 Participate in course evaluation once at the end of the first offering, and then according to the curriculum update schedule of the program (typically every 3 to 4 years).

6.6.7 Implement a variety of assessment methods, including quizzes, exams, and projects, through online platforms.

6.6.8 Establish clear evaluation criteria and provide prompt feedback to enhance the learning process.

6.6.9 Ensure the integrity of online assessments through appropriate measures.

6.6.10 Post final grades in the AUCA grading system

6.7. Exceptional Circumstances for offering online courses:

6.4.1 State of Emergency

6.4.2 Political unrest

6.4.3 Personal students circumstances, such as health, family, or visa

6.4.4 Extreme weather conditions or natural disasters

## 7. Student Guidelines

7.1 Students sign up during registration for the class and the mode of instruction the plan to study. Students commit to this mode of study for the duration of the semester.

7.2 If the mode of instruction changes due to university or professorial decision, students will sign their consent to indicate their agreement to the mode of change.

7.3 If the student faces extraordinary circumstances (see examples below), the professor may permit the student to change mode of study, if available. This change will be made in writing between the professor and student. The head or chair of the program should be notified of the circumstance. The chair of the program may also direct the student to a different section of the course already offered online.

7.4 Students must have the necessary equipment to study online if they select that mode.

7.5 The university will provide an online orientation and / or learning course training for students who will study online and offline, according to the selected mode.

7.6 All policies related to academic integrity apply to online and hybrid programs and courses.

7.6 Extraordinary circumstances include

7.6.1 State of Emergency

7.6.2 Political unrest

7.6.3 Personal students' circumstances, such as health, family, or visa. The appropriate documentation must be provided along with the request, such as a medical certificate.

7.6.4 Extreme weather conditions or natural disasters

## 8. Training

8.1 Faculty may attend training sessions on effective distance learning strategies and technologies with the CTLT.

8.2 Faculty must stay updated on best practices in online education and incorporate new methodologies into course design.

## 9. Collaboration

9.1 Faculty are encouraged to engage in collaborative efforts with colleagues to share experiences and strategies for successful distance learning.

9.2 Faculty contribute to the ongoing improvement of distance learning practices within the institution by participating in seminars organized by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology and other programs focused on distance learning and general teaching practices for adults.

## 10. State Attestation

10.1 Programs may offer online state attestation by forming the State Attestation Commission. This committee should be the same for both online and offline working modes.

10.2 Programs need to organize a clear online work format for the State Attestation Commission. As part of this work format, programs must develop online state regulations policy, including how to schedule defense and exams in an online mode, guidelines for student behavior during exams and defense, and when scores will be available.

10.3 Programs may organize travel for the State Attestation Commission to a destination in order to provide State Attestation in person to a group of students.

## 11. Technical support

Technical support is available to faculty and students. Each classroom is equipped with an interactive whiteboard. Some classrooms are equipped with microphones, cameras, and speakers. Portable cameras, microphones, and speakers are available on demand at the IT support desk, room 242.

Faculty and students have access to Moodle- Learning Management System. Technical support can be obtained in room 201, or by email: [ecourse@auca.kg](mailto:ecourse@auca.kg) or [ctlt@auca.kg](mailto:ctlt@auca.kg)

Library resources are accessible to faculty and students through online access. Electronic versions of textbooks and subscriptions are also available to faculty and students.

Faculty and students may collaborate with technical support services to address any issues related to the online learning environment promptly.

Faculty will inform students of available technical support resources.

## **12. Quality Assurance**

Programs and classes designed according to the Distance Learning Policy remain subject to quality assurance review according to the Quality Assurance Policy.