




Distance Education Format Proposal For A Proposed or Registered Program

Form 4
Version 2014-11-17

When a new or existing program is designed for a [distance education format](#), a campus Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer should submit a signed cover letter and this completed form to the SUNY Provost at program.review@suny.edu. According to MSCHE, the 50% standard includes only courses offered in their entirety via distance education, not courses utilizing mixed delivery methods. Also, MSCHE requires that the first two programs for which 50% or more is offered through distance education be submitted for Commission review and prior approval of a substantive change.

- All campuses must complete the following sections: Sections 1 - 3, and Part B: Program Specific Issues.
- Part A must be completed if the proposing campus has not previously submitted this form with a completed Part A: Institution-wide Issues, or has made significant changes to its institution-wide distance education operations since last completing Part A. This applies even if the institution has programs registered to be delivered at a distance.

Section 1. General Information	
a) Institutional Information	Institution's 6-digit SED Code : 210500
	Institution's Name: University at Albany
	Address: 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12222
b) Registered or Proposed Program	Program Title: Geography
	SED Program Code 03065
	Award(s) (e.g., A.A., B.S.): B.A.
	Number of Required Credits: Minimum [120] If tracks or options, largest minimum [120]
	HEGIS Code : 2206
	CIP 2010 Code : 45.0701
c) Distance Education Contact	Name and title: Billie Franchini – Director for the Institute for teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership Telephone: (518) 442-4850 E-mail: bfranchini@albany.edu
d) Chief Executive or Chief Academic Officer Approval	Signature affirms that the proposal has met all applicable campus administrative and shared governance procedures for consultation, and the institution's commitment to support the proposed program. <i>E-signatures are acceptable.</i> Name and title: Carol Kim, Ph.D., Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs & Provost  Signature and date: 8/4/2022
If the program will be registered jointly¹ with one or more other institutions, provide the following information for <u>each</u> institution:	

¹ If the partner institution is non-degree-granting, see SED's [CEO Memo 94-04](#).

Partner institution's name and 6-digit [SED Code](#):

Name, title, and signature of partner institution's CEO (or **append** a signed letter indicating approval of this proposal):

Section 2: Enrollment

Year	Anticipated Headcount Enrollment			Estimated FTE
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	
1	10		10	10
2	10		10	10
3	10		10	10
4	10		10	10
5	10		10	10

Section 3: Program Information

a) **Term length** (in weeks) for the distance program:

15 weeks

b) Is this the same as term length for classroom program? [] No [X] Yes

c) How much "**instructional time**" is required per week per credit for a distance course in this program? (Do not include time spent on activities that would be done outside "class time," such as research, writing assignments, or chat rooms.) **NOTE:** See [SUNY policy on credit/contact hours](#) and [SED guidance](#).

Online courses are designed to be the equivalent in terms of instructional time and materials covered in face-to-face courses. Instructional time will be 150-160 minutes a week for 15 weeks.

d) What proportion or percentage of the program will be offered in Distance Education format? Will students be able to complete 100 percent of the program online? If not, what proportion will be able to be completed online?

50% of the program will be offered online.

e) What is the maximum number of students who would be enrolled in an online course section?

It depends on the class and the instructor. Usually it is 120 students for introductory courses (100 and 200 level) and 30 students for upper level courses (300-400 level).

Part A: Institution-wide Issues: Submit Part A only for the **first** Distance Education program proposed by your institution using this form. SUNY and the State Education Department will keep this in a master file so that your institution will not need to resubmit it for each new proposed online program, **unless there are significant changes, such as a new platform.**

Part A.1. Organizational Commitment

a) Describe your institution's planning process for Distance Education, including how the need for distance access was identified, the nature and size of the intended audiences, and the provisions for serving those audiences, including how each student's identity will be verified.

- b) Describe your institution's resources for distance learning programs and its student and technical support services to ensure their effectiveness. What course management system does your institution use?
- c) Describe how the institution trains faculty and supports them in developing and teaching online courses, including the pedagogical and communication strategies to function effectively. Describe the qualifications of those who train and/or assist faculty, or are otherwise responsible for online education.
- d) If your institution uses courses or academic support services from *another provider*, describe the process used (with faculty participation) to evaluate their quality, academic rigor, and suitability for the award of college credit and a degree or certificate.
- e) Does your institution have a clear *policy on ownership of course materials* developed for its distance education courses? How is this policy shared with faculty and staff? **NOTE:** You may refer to [SUNY's statement on copyright and faculty ownership of instructional content](#), and/or faculty contract provisions.

Part A.2. Learner Support

- a) Describe how your institution provides distance students with *clear information* on:
 - Program completion requirements
 - The nature of the learning experience
 - Any specific student background, knowledge, or technical skills needed
 - Expectations of student participation and learning
 - The nature of interactions among faculty and students in the courses.
 - Any technical equipment or software required or recommended.
- b) Describe how your institution provides distance learners with adequate *academic and administrative support*, including academic advisement, technical support, library and information services, and other student support services normally available on campus. Do program materials clearly define how students can access these support services?
- c) Describe how *administrative processes* such as admissions and registration are made available to distance students, and how program materials inform students how to access these services.
- d) What *orientation* opportunities and resources are available for students of distance learning?

Part B: Program-Specific Issues: Submit Part B for each new request to add Distance Education Format to a proposed or registered program.

Part B.1. Learning Design

- a) How does your institution ensure that the *same academic standards and requirements* are applied to the program on campus and through distance learning? If the curriculum in the Distance Education program differs from that of the on-ground program, please identify the differences.

Instructors will adopt the same learning objectives for distance learning as in-person learning. While teaching methods might be different, similar assessments will be adopted for distance learning to achieve the same learning objectives. Any newly proposed course will go through the same process of approval that all courses go through. The department faculty will discuss the proposed syllabus to ensure the learning outcomes are appropriate and meet all university and program standards. Once the course is approved by the department and college and it is in the course bulletin, faculty will decide what mode of delivery they want to offer the course in. Regardless of mod of delivery, the learning outcomes are the same. Syllabi are collected and reviewed each semester a course is taught, to confirm the course's learning outcomes are being met.

- b) Are the courses that make up the distance learning program offered in a sequence or configuration that allows *timely completion of requirements*?

Yes. The course offering sequence will be the same as in-person program.

- c) How do faculty and others ensure that *the technological tools* used in the program are appropriate for the content and intended learning outcomes?

The University provides a course management system (currently Blackboard) to be used by faculty for online and hybrid teaching modalities. This platform offers a space for each class to participate. Technology that is accessible to be used through this platform is discussion boards, video links, reading links, messaging, document submission, and many other resources. The University also provides Zoom which may be used for lectures, office hours, and student collaborative work. Instructors are required to attend online teaching trainings offered by the university. The Department's Executive Committee reviews all syllabi and make sure each instructor's use of technological tools is appropriate and will suggest tools if needed.

- d) How does the program provide for appropriate and flexible interaction between faculty and students, and among students?

Students are assigned a faculty advisor that will always serve as a good point of contact for any student, including online students. In the classroom, faculty have access to technology that they will use to interact with students. Zoom provides space for the whole class to get together, as well as breakout rooms for student interactions. Zoom may also be used for office hours. Discussion boards and commenting may be used on Blackboard for interaction between students. The department can offer online social events such as student orientation, GIS Day, and graduate party, and encourage the establishment of student groups such as clubs.

- e) How do faculty teaching online courses verify 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 academic credit?

Instructors can use many different technologies and instruments to ensure students registered are the one attending the class. Here are a few examples:

- Students will be required to turn on the camera during online classes.
- Students are required to meet virtually with the instructor during office hours at the beginning of the semester, and verify their IDs.
- Technologies such as Responds Lockdown screens with camera can be used to ensure students who take the exams are the students who enrolled in the class.
- The University has a two layer authentication and authorization system. Students establish a NETID through the University that is unique to them and that they create a password for. They use this to get access to Blackboard, but then sign into Blackboard. In addition Blackboard utilizes Safe Assign as a tool to monitor the completion tasks within its environment.

Part B.2. Outcomes and Assessment

- a) Distance learning programs are expected to produce the *same learning outcomes* as comparable classroom-based programs. How are these learning outcomes identified – in terms of knowledge, skills, or credentials – in course and program materials?

Learning outcomes are required on all geography syllabi. All distance learning students will receive a copy of the syllabus at the start of each course. Learning outcomes for courses must support the learning outcomes set for the program, which are:

Learning objectives for Geography BA program:

- 1. An understanding of the complex spatial relationships, interactions, and processes within the cultural and natural environments of the Earth's surface.**
- 2. An understanding of geography's distinctive disciplinary perspectives including concepts of place, location, region, and environment, along with exposure to the varied theoretical worlds of contemporary geography.**
- 3. Proficiency in two or more of the basic analytic skills of cartography, remote sensing and image analysis, statistical analysis, and geographic information systems.**
- 4. A demonstrated ability to apply geographic knowledge in either research or an internship**

These learning objectives are derived based on the conceptual understanding of geography as a field, mastery of technical skills in geography, and the need to apply geographical knowledge and skills in research and real life.

- b) Describe how the *means chosen for assessing student learning* in this program are appropriate to the content, learning design, technologies, and characteristics of the learners.

Learning outcomes are assessed in a number of ways:

- 1) reviewing exam responses to appropriate questions designed to measure the objectives in the four core courses AGOG 101, 102, 106, and 493 (typically each course is reviewed once every other year).**
- 2) reviewing exam response to appropriate questions designed to measure the objectives in advanced elective courses (typically each course is reviewed once every other year).**
- 3) writing samples for core courses are also reviewed in rotation every other year.**

Part B.3. Program Evaluation

- a) What process is in place to monitor and *evaluate the effectiveness* of this particular distance education program on a regular basis?

The Geography Department conducts annual reviews of the student learning outcomes by reviewing the syllabi of courses taught each year, as well as by reviewing writing samples and exam responses, to ensure students are meeting the learning objectives of each course and the program. This will also be completed for online courses as well.

- b) How will the evaluation results will be used for *continuous program improvement*?

When weaknesses are detected in any learning outcome, the faculty teaching courses associated with this learning objective are contacted and discussion on an appropriate response is carried out. This could

include adding additional materials regarding the learning objective, creating an assignment specific to the learning objective or just emphasizing the learning objective within the existing courses. Though it has not happened, revising the program learning objectives is also a possibility.

- c) How will the evaluation process assure that the *program results in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth* of the college degree or certificate awarded?

The same process as is currently used in the existing program. All courses are designed to meet the University's standards for rigor. If the courses evaluated show that the learning objectives are being met by a minimum of 75% of students and we are retaining 85% of or more of declared majors or which 95% graduate, then no changes are made. If any of these baseline metrics are not met, the program Director will determine an appropriate course of action in consultation with all faculty in the Department of Geography and Planning. This may result in changes to courses or the program, additional assignments or exams, or development of new courses if needed.

Part B.4. Students Residing Outside New York State

SUNY programs must comply with all "[authorization to operate" regulations](#) that are in place in other U.S. states where the institution has enrolled students or is otherwise active, based on each state's definitions.

- a) What processes are in place to monitor the U.S. state of residency of students enrolled in any distance education course in this program while residing in their home state?

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) process allows the University at Albany to deliver our online programs in states outside New York.

SARA is a voluntary agreement among its member states and U.S. territories that establishes one set of national standards and regulations for offering postsecondary distance education courses and programs.

This agreement is administered by four regional educational compacts and overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA).

New York is a member of SARA and the University at Albany is an approved SARA institution. We adhere to the established SARA standards for offering online education among member states, districts and territories.

As a result, our online students benefit from expanded access to educational offerings, an enhanced quality of distance education and better resolution of any complaints.

- b) Federal regulations require institutions delivering courses by distance education to provide students or prospective students with contact information for filing complaints with the state approval or licensing entity in the student's state of residency and any other relevant state official or agency that would appropriately handle a student's complaint. What is the URL on your institution's website where contact information for filing complaints for students in this program is posted?

https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#academic_grievance

https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_student_complaints.htm