PCCC
Distance Education
Policy Manual

Version 2.1
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INTRODUCTION

Passaic County Community College has been offering classes in several distinct distance credit-bearing education modalities, both synchronous and asynchronous, since 2000. Interactive Television (ITV) courses have been used at the college since 1998, synchronously connecting classrooms at the Paterson main campus with Wanaque Academic Center and the Public Safety Academy. Fully online and hybrid online classes, first introduced in 2000, have grown from approximately 100 seats filled in 2000 to 2,400 seats filled in each major semester of 2012. Online classes are offered to students in all semesters, including summer sessions, in the academic calendar. PCCC views distance education as an alternative, but equivalent, method of instruction to the traditional classroom, face-to-face form of learning. All instruction for non-credit bearing courses, both face-to-face and online, is handled separately by PCCC’s division of Continuing Education.

MISSION OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The PCCC Distance Education Program is committed to the College’s mission directive to “address a wide variety of student learning needs through excellence in teaching, innovative and effective use of technology, [and] multiple instructional methods”.

The mission of the PCCC Distance Education Program is to provide educational opportunities to existing and future students in its service area of Passaic County, New Jersey. This includes those students who, due to special needs, time, work, family obligations or personal preference are unable to attend classes in person at any one of the college’s campuses.

Based on current trends in student demand for distance education class offerings, PCCC will focus on delivering sufficient courses/sections primarily in the General Education course areas, while maintaining its desire to offer four of its degree programs, the A.A.S. in Health Information Technology, the A.A. in Liberal Arts (Humanities Option), the A.A.S. in Fire Science Technology and the A.A. in Liberal Arts (Criminal Justice Option) in a fully online modality.

In addition, the PCCC Distance Education Program’s mission is to continue to evaluate current and newly emerging electronic technologies to constantly improve and enhance the learning experiences of PCCC students in its alternate course delivery methods.
PRESENTATION METHODS

PCCC uses fully online, hybrid online, web enhanced online classes and Interactive Television classes as synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods. Below is a definition of these terms as adopted by the college’s Educational Technology Committee, a sub-committee of the PCCC Academic Council.

- Online Classes. An online course is one provided through the college’s Learning Management System. An online course can be taken by a student and given by an instructor from any location with an internet connection. Typically, an online course has no in-person campus-based meetings. However, some courses may require in-person testing.

There are three types of online courses:

A) **Online without a synchronous component** – These online courses do not require the student to be online at specific times.

B) **Online with a synchronous component** – These online courses have a limited requirement for synchronous activities requiring the student to be online at specific times.

C) **Online with fieldwork component** - These courses typically require the student to perform supervised fieldwork as well as online activities.

- **Hybrid** - A hybrid course is one in which there is scheduled classroom time throughout the semester, as well as required online activities completed at a distance and managed online.

The hybrid course uses web-based learning activities to complement in-person work. The web-based and in-person components of the course are designed to interact pedagogically to take advantage of the best features of each.

- **Web-Enhanced** – A Web-Enhanced course is a traditional, in-person course utilizing technology that serves as a repository for content and resources that supplement the classroom component. There is no reduction in classroom time.

- **Interactive Television (ITV):** uses electronic hardware and software to connect two physically remote classrooms through both audio and video on one or more PCCC campuses so that one instructor can simultaneously (synchronously) teach students in real time in two locations. ITV classes will be used primarily to offer instruction to two campuses at the same time or to students in two same course sections where
low enrollment in one or other course section would result in course/section cancellations.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES AND STUDENT ACCESS

Students may enroll for online and hybrid online classes by any one of three methods.

Traditional methods of class registration are by means of electronic self-registration and in-person registration. In addition, for online classes only, a web-based electronic registration request form is also available.

Students meeting eligibility requirements may use the Web Advisor in their student portal or register in-person either through the Center for Student Success (or equivalent at campuses other than Paterson) or during the period of arena registration immediately before the start of classes each semester. Additionally, students may request registration into online classes by means of the Online Request for Registration form found on the Online Learning Department’s web page: http://www.pccc.edu/online_learning. Registrations and, hence, advisement of students is handled by members of the Online Learning Department who communicate registration status by email. The entire Admission’s Application process as well as registration for online classes can be handled remotely by electronic means. Enrollment through the latter method is handled on a first-come, first-serve basis to PCCC and visiting students and requests made by the submission of the Online Request for Registration form are promised a 24-48 hour response time from the time of submission. All students receive an email notification of the completion of their registration requests together with a set of access and login instructions to their online class(es) and links to available online student support services.

By college policy, online classes are limited to for-credit college-level courses only and exclude all developmental and ESL classes, which, it is felt, are best addressed pedagogically by face-to-face instruction.

By college policy, students have access to online classes beginning at midnight on the first day of each semester and have continuous 24/7 access to those classes until 11:59 PM of the final day of the semester. In addition, online classes are generally kept open and available for student access (without instructor participation) one week after the final official day of every semester as a courtesy. Online students have access to the entry or portal page of the college’s learning management system within six hours of their registration in the college’s student information system (SIS). The population of enrollments in the online course shell in the learning management system is automated by software which transfers data from the College’s Student Information System to Blackboard, the College’s current learning management system for online classes.
Faculty at the college may voluntarily choose to teach online classes or have the need/possibility suggested to them by the chairpersons of their academic departments. There are no specific policies at PCCC about how the contractually mandated per-semester credit teaching load may be divided between online and face-to-face classes. This is decided on a semester-by-semester basis by agreement of the department chairperson and individual instructor, working within the specific work obligation framework of the faculty association contract. Generally, faculty assignments are divided between online and face-to-face classroom instruction for full-time faculty.

Specific policies concerning online classes as they relate to the faculty association’s contract are governed by the Distance Education Letter of Agreement to this contract.

As per this Letter of Agreement, interested faculty who have never taught an online class previously at PCCC are required to participate as students in a semester-long Online Faculty Training Course (delivered online through the college’s LMS) conducted by the Online Faculty Peer Trainer, a faculty member selected and appointed by the Vice-President of Academic Affairs. This course is offered twice a year, during the Fall and Spring academic semesters. The Online Faculty Training Course focuses on both the technical skills required to use the LMS currently in use at the college as well as basic standards of quality online course design as derived from the college’s membership in QualityMatters and the adoption of an in-house Basic Standards of Quality Online Course Design as agreed upon and adopted by the Educational Technology Committee and the Academic Council of the college.

As part of this Training Course, faculty students are required to practically apply what they are learning in the creation of their own future online class offering, which will be offered live to students in the next major semester. By the end of the Training Course, the Online Faculty Peer Trainer will either give his/her approval or disapproval for the actual release of this newly created course in the following major semester.

Remuneration to new online faculty members is made on the basis of article III in the Distance Education Letter of Agreement and is earned by the faculty members’ participation in the Online Faculty Training Course and the approval of their own course design and creation. Payment of the stipend is made the first time a new online faculty member’s online class actually runs.

Because the Online Faculty Training Course program went into effect in the Spring, 2012 semester, faculty who previously designed and taught an online course at PCCC were grandfathered from the requirement to participate in this Training Course for pre-existing online classes. To address the quality of these grandfathered courses, the Online Faculty Trainer has begun a scheduled evaluation of grandfathered online courses using the Basic Standards of Quality Online Course Design document noted above. The Online Faculty Peer Trainer meets with the faculty course designer/instructor and reviews the online course.
Additional faculty training is offered through the option of onsite and online training workshops and modules provided by and purchased from the college’s LMS vendor. In-house training of faculty is further offered by the Distance Education Department’s Instructional Designer and the Technology Resources Specialist through regularly scheduled workshops. One-on-one training of faculty by members of the Distance Education Department is a further option. Electronic faculty resources are permanently available as well through Online Learning LibGuides web site at: [http://pccc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=5836&sid=2907597](http://pccc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=5836&sid=2907597)

Online courses at PCCC are designed and built, with the technical assistance of members of the Distance Education administrative group, by the PCCC faculty themselves. Use of a faculty member’s online course, in whole or in part, by another faculty member is based on a private agreement between the two faculty and cannot be mandated by the college.

Faculty wishing to use the learning management system and online course shells in supplement to a face-to-face class are offered regularly scheduled as well as one-on-one training opportunities by the College’s Instructional Designer.

**Course Ownership:** By the terms of the Distance Education Letter of Agreement supplemental to the Faculty Association Contract, ownership is considered the “joint property of the College and the faculty member [who designed and taught any online class].”

**STUDENT TRAINING AND SUPPORT AND OTHER STUDENT ISSUES**

**Student Training:** student training in the use of the tools of the learning management system for online classes is delivered by a variety of methods:

- All students registered for online classes receive two emails from the Distance Education Department: one upon registration (if the online request for registration form is used) and at a time after enrollments have been processed by the LMS but before the beginning of classes. These emails provide detailed initial access and login instructions for students to reach and start their online classes. In addition, hyperlinks point students to the variety of written and video resources available to them at the Distance Education Department’s LibGuide site on the internet: [http://pccc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=5836&sid=2907602](http://pccc.libguides.com/content.php?pid=5836&sid=2907602). Links to LMS vendor-supplied interactive video tutorials are also provided.
- A sample online class is also available for students and potential students to explore as part of this LibGuide web site. This is public and does not require a personal login to access. As part of this sample online class, a self-test is available to students which allows them to assess their preparedness for taking online classes at the college. This self-test is scored to provide interested participants with an evaluation of their readiness for online instructions. The college does not, however, make a successful score on this self-test prescriptive for registration into online classes.
- In person, face-to-face presentations for students are scheduled in the two weeks immediately before and after the first day of each semester. These presentations
cover student preparedness to take online classes and discuss, in brief, the major tools in the LMS commonly used by instructors. These are offered currently at the Paterson and Wanaque campuses, but may be expanded to Passaic if demand warrants.

**Student Support Services**: Every effort is made to provide the full range of student support services to PCCC students who wish to conduct their educational experience remotely without recourse to in-person visits to a PCCC campus. This statement refers to the following support services:

- **Online class technical support**: students may receive help for access and LMS-related issues by means of email (online@pccc.edu) or by telephone (973-684-5790). Since single sign-on authentication passes student credentials from the web-based student portal to the LMS instance, staff members are enabled to reset passwords in the student portal for students. In addition, an online help desk located in the student portal’s public entry page lists all other PCCC employees capable of doing password resets. PCCC has also contracted with Ellucian Student Support Services to provide 24/7 phone support for a variety of student password-reset, Blackboard tool and Microsoft Office applications questions and problems.

- **Payment of Tuition/Fees**: PCCC permits payment of all tuition/fees by credit card or check through a secure web-based system through the student portal.

- **Admission’s Office**: the admission’s application to the college may be accessed and submitted electronically from the college’s web site: [http://pccc.edu/uploads/48/4f/484f42d64dd9bce33631e7741c813966/Admission_Application_distributed.pdf](http://pccc.edu/uploads/48/4f/484f42d64dd9bce33631e7741c813966/Admission_Application_distributed.pdf)

- **Financial Aid**: Links for downloading and submitting the FAFSA are available from the Financial Aid Department’s web pages. Information on specific eligibility and problems with application are conducted by email with students.

- **College Bookstore**: the college bookstore maintains a website: [http://www.bkstr.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/StoreCatalogDisplay?catalogId=10001&langId=-1&storeId=10141&demoKey=d](http://www.bkstr.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/StoreCatalogDisplay?catalogId=10001&langId=-1&storeId=10141&demoKey=d) which provides students with specific information on required textbooks and the option of ordering texts online and having them delivered to a student’s home or other location.

- **Library Resources**: the library’s catalog is available online. In addition, links are provided so that PCCC students may access all the major library database resources remotely from off-campus locations as well: [http://www.pccc.edu/library](http://www.pccc.edu/library)

**VERIFICATION OF IDENTITY OF ONLINE CLASS PARTICIPANTS**

PCCC complies with the Higher Education Opportunity ACT of 2008, Section 602.17, Subsection G which requires institutions offering distance education to establish that the student who registers for a distance education class is the same student who participates in and completes course work and received the academic credit. This is done by means of a secure login and pass code to access online classes which is comprised of a combination of personalized information supplied to the student as a part of the Admission’s process and personal information specific
to the student himself/herself. A written “Verification of Compliance with Accreditation – Relevant Federal Regulations” which outlines PCCC’s policies on student identity verification was sent to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in January 2014. Privacy of student personal information as per FERPA guidelines is ensured by password-protected access to online courses. Apart from the PCCC support personnel who have access to the administrative screens of the learning management system and the ability to reset student passwords in the student portal, the Ellucian Help Desk support personnel are restricted to view-only access of limited student personal information sufficient for them to verify the identity of callers.

Upon every access to the learning management system, students are required to agree to an acknowledgement and consent statement to indicate their understanding that personal information such as portal usernames, student email addresses and any self-provided personal information may be shared with classmates within the framework of the learning management system.

The Distance Education Department routinely investigates new technologies as they become available in the effort to improve the process of verifying student identity and measuring these for effectiveness, cost to the college and additional cost to the student.

PROCTORED TESTING

In person, proctored testing of online PCCC students has been mandated at the departmental level by the Science and the Health Information Technology Departments and may be required by individual instructors at the course level as well. To date, in addition to Science and HIT, many CIS, Business and Math faculty have required students to take one or more in-person, proctored tests throughout the semester.

Since 95+% of all PCCC online students live in zip codes immediately adjacent to one of the campuses, this is not an undue hardship for most PCCC students. Information is obtained from faculty each semester about the necessity for in-person testing and this information is made available to students at the time of registration, so informed decisions about individual courses and testing requirements can be made in advance of registration.

In-person proctored testing is conducted at three of PCCC’s campuses: the main campus in Paterson (at the dedicated Testing Center), Passaic and Wanaque. Students are required to present two forms of photo ID, one of which must be their PCCC student ID, to verify identity. All tests are observed by at least one in-person proctor. In addition, software installed on all testing PC terminals permits proctors to lock down testing computers and monitor all computer activity from a central administrative terminal.

Students who are unable to come in to a PCCC campus are also accommodated. These students are required at the beginning of the semester to find a testing location and proctor in their area which requires approval from the instructor of the course. Generally, other colleges and universities, public libraries and military installations are commonly used and authorized sites. The student is liable for any additional expense for testing these third-party sites may charge.
At the time of this writing, the Educational Technology Committee is developing a standardized policy and form for students in all online classes who require a testing location and proctor apart from a PCCC campus.

QUALITY OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

At PCCC, Distance Education is not a separate division of the college but a department reporting to the Division of Academic Affairs. At this time, the Distance Education department consists of a Director of Online Learning, an Instructional Designer and a Technology Resources Specialist (which is a half-time position). All report to the Assistant Dean for Learning Resources who, in turn, reports directly to the Vice-President of Academic Affairs. Faculty who teach online are hired by and report directly to academic department chairpersons and not the Distance Education Department.

All academic standards for online classes are the same as those for face-to-face classes and subject to the same contractual and non-contractual reviews for program assessment, curricular review, departmental level course review and student outcomes assessments. While it is understood that online classes are a different academic delivery medium than face-to-face classes, online classes are obligated to meet the same or equivalent standards for quality as do face-to-face classes. This intention is met by the following methods:

- **Program review:** all departments, academic or otherwise, reporting to the Academic Affairs Division of the college are required to undergo periodic review of their operations and work. Several methodologies are used for this, including program review of the Distance Education program by an independent outside consultant, the first of which took place in December, 2012.

- **Student Ratings of Instruction (SRIs):** in order to determine student perception of the quality of instruction in online classes, the same Student Rating of Instruction is delivered to students in online classes as that delivered to students in the face-to-face classroom (See Appendix D for an example). These are delivered using the survey tool available in the learning management system and are conducted by the Director of Online Learning. Faculty to receive SRIs in each major semester (Fall and Spring terms only) are determined by the Academic Affairs Division for full-time faculty and by the Adjunct Office Director for part-time faculty. While faculty are informed of the decision to survey their students, the delivery system of the survey in the LMS does not permit faculty to be involved in the delivery process and they only receive results at the end of the SRI availability period (typically, one and a half weeks).

- **Quality of faculty course design and the ability to teach in an online environment is maintained by the necessity for all new potential online faculty to participate in a semester long Online Faculty Training Course run by the designated Online Faculty Trainer, a faculty member appointed by the Vice-President of Academic Affairs. (See Faculty Training above)**

- **Basic standards for online course pedagogy and other online course issues are decided on by the Educational Technology Committee, a group of full-time faculty and administrators, which is a subcommittee of the PCCC Academic Council. See the**
Appendices for copies of Educational Technology Committee approved and adopted documents in the following areas:

- Basic Standards of Online Course Design
- Definitions of online course types (fully online, hybrid, web-enhanced)

These documents may or may not be brought to Academic Council for debate and approval, as needed, and are disseminated to all relevant groups on campus as they apply.

- Contact Hour Time Equivalency of Online Courses. In order to ensure that the contact time of instruction in online classes and scheduled face-to-face classroom courses is equivalent, an ad hoc committee of faculty and teaching administrators developed an “Online Course Contact Hour Verification Form”, subsequently revised and approved by the Educational Technology Committee for online faculty members to use. This form allows online faculty to perform a self-evaluation of their own online courses and provides specific online activities with average time equivalents for completion. Thus, average viewing times for online course PowerPoint presentations, reading times for text presented online, average minutes to post/reply on Discussion Boards has been established. By using the checklist area of the form, faculty can total up all online activities which are equivalent to classroom activities and determine if the student-instructor contact times are equivalent. Non-classroom activities, such as homework or textbook reading, have been strictly excluded from the list of activities available for calculation on this form. Online faculty have been asked to submit completed “Online Course Contact Hour Verification Forms” at the end of each semester to the Distance Education Department as well as to the Office of Academic Affairs.

- Student Outcomes: relative to assessment of student outcomes, all academic departments are required to compile student outcomes in online courses as well as in face-to-face courses. Generally, outcomes measurement methods are the same in online classes as in face-to-face classes. For example, embedded questions in a final exam, a final project, or the use student portfolios are identical in both online and face-to-face classes. It is understood that, due to the nature of the delivery medium, outcomes assessment may be different from those used in a face-to-face class, although every effort is made to establish equivalent measures of assessment. Compilation of student outcomes’ assessment and the level at which course learning objectives have been met is done by each individual academic department and all results are retained in a master file in the Academic Affairs Division office as well as by the Distance Education Department.

- Student Attrition: one area of special concern to the Distance Education department is student attrition (i.e., withdrawal results during the course of the semester). While per-semester attrition rates for all the students at PCCC have not yet been established by its Institutional Research Department, it is apparent that Attrition in online classes is higher than that in face-to-face courses. For PCCC, in a February 2006 study by the college’s IR department, traditional face-to-face students withdraw at a 7.2% per semester. The withdrawal rate per semester for online students was measured at 12.3%. This trend
has been independently confirmed at the national level as well, particularly through a report compiled in the 2010-2012 National Community College Benchmark Project (at Johnson County Community College) which has looked at withdrawal rates at 300 community colleges nationally in Fall, 2012 and reported a median course drop rate of 13.8% per semester vs. a 16.9% rate at PCCC.

For this reason, the Online Learning Department at PCCC has done ongoing research and re-confirmed a median attrition rate of 16% in its own online classes, from the 10th day of semester. While the drop rate does appear to be decreasing, research has been conducted into the reasons for student withdrawal through an obligatory answer required to be completed by students in its online request for withdrawal form. Collation of results over several years indicates that time management issues was the leading single largest reason (75% of responses) for withdrawals. Technical difficulties with accessing or using the online class technology accounted for 15% or less of the primary reason for student withdrawal. This has resulted in an increasing focus on student preparedness to take online classes, accomplished through in-person student orientations, public videos, and public sample classes made available to students before registration.

THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM: SELF-ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

The Academic Affairs division requires the Distance Education Department itself to undergo the same self-evaluation and future planning procedures as all other departments at the college. To this end, the Distance Education maintains and periodically updates, according to the life-cycle of the instrument, the following items, of which the most current are found in the Appendices to this document:

- An annual budget monitored by the Budget Office of the college. This involves annually submitted requests and monitored expenditures for both operating and capital needs.
- Two year departmental goals.
- A three year strategic plan which must include anticipated future financial needs to extend the budget planning process two years beyond each year’s annual budget.
- Participation in college-wide self-assessment through the preparation and maintenance of Institutional Effectiveness grids which set activities to be assessed, methods of assessment, benchmarked standards of success, results and use of results to, in turn, improve those benchmarked success levels.
- Annual Reports submitted to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.
- Self-evaluation through the Standard 13 component of the Middle States Accreditation Agency’s Standards of Excellence as preparation for the decennial Middle States team visits and the intermediate five year self-studies.