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Title: Distance Education Policy

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Review: The policy is subject to a periodic review every 4 years or in a
shorter cycle as per amendments of university policies

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the principles of Gulf University's provision of quality education and administrative services in distance education. The policy also guides academic staff to provide students with a learning experience in distance education mode that allows them to achieve program learning outcomes. Distance education Policy ensures that teaching is based on sound educational principles and complies with criteria set by relevant regulatory authorities.

2. Scope

This document applies to all types of distance teaching, learning, and assessment activities in all academic programs, as well as administrative functions complying with regulatory body requirements.

3. Acronyms

BQA	Education and Training Quality Authority
CILOS	Course Intended Learning Outcomes
HOD	Head of Department
HEC	Higher Education Council
LMS	Learning Management System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
GU	Gulf University
PILOS	Program Intended Learning Outcomes
IT	Information Technology

4. Definitions

Academic Program: The academic program is a combination of courses and related activities organized to achieve specific learning outcomes, as defined by the university.

Program Intended Learning Outcomes: Program Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) describe the knowledge, skills, and attributes envisioned to be achievable by students who have followed a program of study. Demonstration of achievement of PILOs is a necessary requirement for awarding a qualification associated with a program.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes: Course-intended learning Outcomes (CILOs) describe the knowledge, skills, and attributes envisioned to be achievable by students who have been enrolled in a course. CILOs, therefore, contribute to PILOs. A learning outcome states what students should be able to

do by the time they have completed the course or program for which the outcome is set. Outcomes can include knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The attainment of an outcome is determined through the assessment process.

Lectures: The course instructor introduces specific topics to develop students' knowledge and understanding through presentations, handouts, video material, and other tools. Additionally, the instructors are keen to encourage the students' participation in class discussions, raise questions, and take an active role in enhancing their learning.

Instructor: An instructor is an individual appointed by Gulf University to teach its courses.

Learning: Learning is understood to encompass the knowledge and skills that result from engagement with the teaching activities planned and designed for a program of study. Learning is cumulative and can manifest itself in many forms, and assessment needs to consider this. New learning builds on and expands existing learning.

The Learning Management System: The Learning Management System (LMS) is a Web-based technology (i.e., software application) used by instructors to plan, implement, and assess the learning process. LMS allows instructors to generate and deliver content, observe students' participation, and assess their performance. Moreover, LMS provides students with a friendly, creative, and learning environment to enhance their knowledge.

Learning Resources: Learning resources comprise all aspects of the learning environments in which students are immersed as they engage with programs of study. They, therefore, comprise equipped classrooms, studios, laboratories, libraries, an online learning platform (LMS, such as Moodle), and learning materials produced by instructors.

Student: A student is an individual who has completed the formal procedures necessary to register in a program offered by Gulf University.

Teaching: Teaching refers to activities planned and designed to ensure that students can achieve the learning outcomes set for courses in a program. Teaching may be face-to-face and take the form of lectures or more informal discussions and tutorial sessions. It can also encompass various online activities designed and selected as part of an overall teaching approach or distance education. In addition, teaching encompasses formative feedback provided to students on assessment tasks. Teaching is enhanced by *reflection on teaching,* a process involving instructors using feedback from students and peers and assessing students' learning to consider how they may re-plan and re-design the overall approach to teaching. Therefore, quality teaching results from reflection on practice to ensure that it allows students to meet program outcomes.

Teaching Strategies: Teaching strategies are the deliberate and planned methods used by an instructor to ensure that students are guided and supported in attaining learning outcomes.

Virtual Learning Environment: The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is an educational space used as an extension tool for normal classroom sessions to enhance the teaching and learning process and practice. Usually, VLE is linked to LMS.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is copying ideas and content from another source without appropriate reference. This can include copying work from another student. Where plagiarism has been detected in any assessment, the Plagiarism Policy and Procedures must be implemented.

Distance Education: It is a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. The program will not exceed 25% of the courses in the study plan to be delivered via distance learning mode.

Synchronous Distance Learning: This learning mode refers to instructors and students gathering simultaneously. Students must also log in and participate in class activities and discussions at a specific time each week.

Asynchronous Distance Learning: Asynchronous distance learning means that the instructor and the students in the course all engage with the course content at different times (and from different locations). The instructor provides students with a sequence of units, which the students move through as their schedules permit. Each unit might use assigned readings or uploaded media, online quizzes, discussion boards, and more. The instructor guides the students, provides feedback, and assesses them as needed.

Hybrid Learning: Hybrid learning is a dynamic educational model that can vary significantly from one course to another. At its core, it combines in-person and virtual learning, allowing some students to attend physical classes while others participate remotely. An essential feature of hybrid learning is that the instructor simultaneously delivers instruction to both in-person and virtual learners, ensuring that no one is left behind. It is a mode of distance education where 30% to 79% of the instruction is conducted online via a university learning management system. The remainder of the instruction is provided in a traditional face-to-face modality. Although the online component is typically asynchronous, it may be synchronous.

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provides feedback, and assesses them as needed.

Digital Platform: It is the software and technology where the student and instructor interact with each other within an assigned course.

5. Policy Statement

5.1 GU believes in a no-detriment approach to ensure that student learning outcomes for each course and program are not compromised in distance education. All actions are implemented flexibly and adaptively to serve the students' interests.

5.2 GU commits to design distance education programs to be accessible to all students, including those with disabilities.

5.3 GU commits to providing the best learning experience in distance education via the Learning Management System (LMS) for its academic and administrative operations without compromising with quality.

5.4 GU is committed to offer academic programs in virtual learning environment which are comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional/face to face education.

5.5 The academic staff is committed to designing teaching, learning, and assessment methods suitable for theoretical and practical courses offered in distance or hybrid mode, emphasizing project-based learning. Course design and delivery in distance learning differs from traditional/face-to-face learning. It allows both instructor and learner to use interactive multimedia tools.

5.6 Gulf University embraces distance learning in its teaching and learning practices and is keen to provide the necessary IT infrastructure. It includes a wide range of methods and platforms, including online courses, digital learning materials, multimedia resources, virtual classrooms, and interactive educational apps.

5.7 GU ensures that major assessments (midterm and final) are conducted on campus through Moodle with proper IT arrangements. Lockdown Browser is used to provide secure environment during online exam in GU computer labs. Students are not permitted to take the online exam outside GU computer labs.

5.8 GU strictly follows the requirements and expectations of regulatory bodies and professional and academic accreditation bodies worldwide to achieve the Intended Learning Outcomes on course and program levels.

5.9 GU ensures the technical viability and supports emerging technology in conducting distance learning and assessment for students and instructors, as

well as managing all administrative or support functions in a digital platform for all stakeholders.

5.10 GU commits to equipping instructors with the required skills in delivering online lectures, with adequate support and training from the IT department.

5.11 GU ensures that attendance of the students via synchronous online sessions are taken by the instructor via learning management system. Attendance regulations are valid for any kind of delivery of course which includes face to face class, hybrid and completely online sessions. However, the instructor does not have the freedom to deliver online sessions or change the face to face session into online unless the decision is approved by relevant people with authority.

5.12 GU ensures validity, reliability, accuracy, consistency, security, and fairness of assessment in distance education.

5.13 GU ensures academic integrity, confidentiality, and data protection once assessments are submitted, along with detecting plagiarism in student work.

5.14 GU ensures the availability of learning resources via online databases for courses and research across the academic program.

5.15 GU is committed to implementing online admission and registration in academic programs and to offering opportunities for online payment of admission fees, registration fees, exam fees, etc.

5.16 Gulf University commits to providing all support services to distance education students such as academic advising, which on-campus students receive regularly.

5.17 GU commits to measuring the effectiveness of distance education for continuous quality enhancement.

5.18 GU shows its endeavor to collect feedback from internal and external stakeholders to identify gap areas while operating in distance mode.

5.19 GU is committed to stay up to date about emerging trends and technologies in distance education to enhance the learning experience.

5.20 GU is committed to organizing curricular and cocurricular activities for students via the Learning Management System (LMS) and providing opportunities for career development.

5.21 GU ensures to be connected virtually with external stakeholders via scientific research and community engagement activities.

5.22 GU commits to organizing online staff professional development activities and encourages staff to participate in webinars, online conferences, workshops, and forums.

5.23 GU is committed to supporting students with special needs to have similar learning experiences in distance education as in face-to-face learning.

5.24 GU adheres to HEC regulation and applies a hybrid learning mode to postgraduate and undergraduate students except in foundation and preparatory years. This is implemented after internal decision followed by approval from HEC.

5.25 GU adheres to HEC regulation and applies distance learning mode to postgraduate programs with a limit between 25% and 75% of courses delivered in the distance mode.

5.26 A student enrolled in a program taught in the traditional or blended learning mode may transfer to the distance education mode, provided that the transfer request submitted by the student includes a statement noting that the distance education mode will be mentioned in the graduation certificate and all relevant documents.

5.27 A student enrolled in a distance education program may transfer to a traditional or blended education mode, provided that the number of credit hours in traditional education is not less than 50% of the total credit hours in the study plan.

5.28 The E-Learning and Instructional Design Unit leads the process of developing distance learning courses and ensures high-quality education for students who enroll in distance or hybrid learning (synchronous or asynchronous) mode. This unit shall comprise an E-Learning facilitator whose IT specialized collaborates with his/her team. The unit is responsible to provide training and workshop to staff and students on how to use the learning management system for teaching, learning and assessment.

6. Responsibilities

BoT is responsible for:

- approving the policy and providing direction towards online learning and digitization.

University Council is responsible for:

- discussing and approving the policy.
- ensuring the overall alignment of distance education policies with the institution's strategic goals and mission.

- allocating resources to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of distance education programs.

The University Policy Development and Review Committee is responsible for:

- systematic review of the effectiveness of this policy.

E-Learning and Instructional Design Unit is responsible for:

- monitoring compliance with quality assurance standards and recommend improvements.

- facilitating communication and collaboration among faculty, staff, and administration regarding distance education initiatives.

Teaching Excellence and Technology Center is responsible for:

- collaborating with faculty to develop effective online courses and instructional materials.

- ensuring that courses are designed with accessibility and inclusivity.

- updating the staff with the latest technologies and instructional strategies in distance education.

Heads of Departments and Program Leaders are responsible for:

- ensuring that all faculty members are fully informed of this policy.

- appropriate implementation of this policy and following up with the enhancement in delivery.

Academic Advisors and Instructors are responsible for:

- appropriate implementation of this document.

- design and delivery of distance education courses that meet academic standards and best practices.

- engaging with students actively, providing timely feedback and support to enhance learning.

- participating in professional development opportunities related to distance education.

Students and Applicants with disability are responsible for:

- following this document appropriately.

- taking responsibility for their learning by engaging actively with course materials and participating in online discussions and activities.

- seeking assistance from faculty and support services when needed.

- adhering to academic integrity policies and guidelines.

Unit of Admission and Registration is responsible for:
- ensuring that all students and applicants are fully informed of this policy.

- appropriate implementation of this policy.

The Examination Committee is responsible for:

- appropriate implementation of this document.

The unit of Student Services is responsible for:

- providing resources and support to students enrolled in distance education programs, including tutoring, technical assistance, and counseling services.

- ensuring that support services are easily accessible and responsive to the needs of distance learners.

The IT department is responsible for:

- maintaining and supporting the technological infrastructure required for distance education, including learning management systems and communication tools.

- Providing training and support for faculty and students in using technology effectively for distance learning.

- Providing an effective security system to verify user identity, protect privacy, ensure service security, information confidentiality, and academic integrity

Staff Professional Development Office is responsible for:

- appropriate implementation of this document.

Quality Assurance and Development Center is responsible for:

- appropriate implementation of this document.

- monitoring and evaluating distance education programs to ensure they meet established quality standards.

- collecting and analyzing data on student outcomes for evidenced-based decision making.

7. Related Policies

- Teaching and Learning Policy

- Assessment Policy

- Disability Policy

- Mapping Programs to National Qualifications Policy

- Program Design, Development, and Approval Policy

- Program Review and Development Policy

- IT Policy

8. Related Procedures

- Teaching and Learning Procedures
- Assessment Procedures
- Assessment Verification and Moderation Procedures
- Distance Education Procedures
- Deferred and Late Assessments Procedures

- Mapping Programs to National Qualifications Procedures
- Program Design, Development, and Approval Procedures
- Program Review and Development Procedures

9. Related References and Standards

BQA	Institutional Reviews Handbook
BQA	National Qualifications Framework Handbook
BQA	Programs-within-College Reviews Handbook
HEC	Regulations and Resolutions