

3.13.4.a

Policy Compliance: Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports

Applicable Policy Statement: An institution includes a review of its distance learning programs in the Compliance Certification.

Judgment

Compliant Non-Compliant Not Applicable

Compliance Report Narrative

Note: Text for all linked documents below can be increased/decreased for ease of reading by pressing your keyboard's Ctrl key while rotating the mouse wheel.

Angelo State University complies with the Commission's policy on Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports.

DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THE COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

A number of ASU programs, including the University Core Curriculum, offer portions of the program online in addition to traditional face-to-face delivery. For most programs, the online components account for less than 50 percent of the available instruction in the given program. In the following discipline areas, however, ASU offers programs that include online components that account for more than 50 percent of the instruction in the given program (see also [Online Programs web page](#)):

College of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction:

- MA in Curriculum and Instruction
- MEd in Guidance and Counseling
- MEd in School Administration
- MEd in Student Development and Leadership in Higher Education

College of Health and Human Services, Department of Nursing and Rehabilitation Sciences:

- Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (the general BSN degree program is not a distance education program; the RN-BSN option, however, is predominately online, as indicated in the [ASU Undergraduate Catalog 2011–2012, p. 238](#))
- Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Clinical Nurse Specialist
- MSN, Family Nurse Practitioner
- MSN, Nurse Educator

College of Business, Department of Security Studies and Criminal Justice:

- Bachelor of Border Security
- Bachelor of Cultural Competence and Security Studies
- Bachelor of Cultural Fluency and Security Studies
- Master of Security Studies
- MS in Border Security
- MS in Criminal Justice

All courses and programs delivered online are evaluated in the same way as courses taught on campus (Core Requirement 2.5, Institutional effectiveness and Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, Institutional effectiveness: educational programs). Assessment processes include direct assessment of courses using embedded rubrics and indirect assessment of courses using the IDEA Center's Student Ratings of Instruction. All academic assessment processes and instruments used in the core curriculum and academic

programs are applied consistently across sections of a course, regardless of delivery method. Results are separated by delivery method (online and traditional) for the purposes of comparing results and making needed improvements. See, for example, the [Overall Results for Learning Goals with Weighted Averages in the Bachelor of Arts in Communication Assessment Report](#).

ASU uses the IDEA Center's Student Ratings of Instruction as one way of assessing faculty and courses. Meaningful differences between IDEA scores are assessed by the adjusted scores in the t-score category ([IDEA Group Summary Report, p. 3](#)). The t-score categories provide statistically meaningful groupings of scores as follows: 56–62 represent scores that are *higher* than the comparison group, while t-scores of 45–55 compare *similarly*. Mean (average) scores are provided for trending purposes. Each semester, ASU's Office of Institutional Research and Accountability requests reports from the IDEA Center to compare results for courses delivered online to those delivered in traditional classrooms. As indicated in the [IDEA Semester Scores by Academic Department](#), scores for ASU onsite and ASU online courses are virtually the same—all adjusted scores for each item fall within the same t-score category.

ASU has addressed distance education in appropriate areas throughout this Compliance Certification Report. See, for example, the following:

- Distance Education in regard to adequacy of full-time faculty (Core Requirement 2.8, Faculty)
- Distance education in regard to library and other learning/information resources (Core Requirement 2.9, Learning resources and services)
- Distance education in regard to student support services (Core Requirement 2.10, Student support services)
- Distance education in regard to professional development of faculty (Comprehensive Standard 3.7.3, Faculty development)
- Distance education in regard to student complaints (Comprehensive Standard 3.13.3 and Federal Requirement 4.5, Student complaints)
- Distance education in regard to verification of student identity (Federal Requirement 4.8.1, Distance and correspondence education: verification of student identity)
- Distance education in regard to protection of student privacy (Federal Requirement 4.8.2, Distance and correspondence education: written procedure for protecting student privacy)

Off Site Team Comments

ASU provides adequate documentation that the *Principles of Accreditation* apply to all programs of the institution, regardless of mode of delivery, with regard to curriculum and instruction, faculty, institutional effectiveness, student services and library and learning resources. However, no evidence is provided with regard to application of *Principles of Accreditation* to distance education in the areas of facilities and finances (especially in regard to the technology infrastructure necessary to support distance learning).

University Response

ASU has more than adequate facilities and finances to support distance education. ASU offers distance learning courses in all of its colleges. Every college leverages the same ASU technology systems for registering, accessing and supporting online courses.

ASU utilizes the Blackboard web-based Learning Management System as its primary means for delivery of distance education courses and online course materials for both on-line and on-campus courses. Blackboard allows faculty and students to share course materials, collaborate, and create virtual classrooms regardless of course delivery mode. Blackboard has been integrated with ASU's Banner student information system to ensure that enrollment and course information in Blackboard is synchronized and up-to-date so that the system accurately reflects current enrollment in appropriate courses.

Blackboard and other distance learning software such as Kaltura, the new video management software, are funded annually through the Distance Education Fee. New service initiatives are often funded through the State's Higher Education Assistance Funds (HEAF) initially, and then sustained through a combination of the Technology Services Fee and the Distance Education Fee, [lines 8 and 6](#), respectively, in the Other General Fees section. An example of this is ASU's portal software, known as RamPort which serves as a centralized access point for online services, was purchased with HEAF funds in 2005, and has been maintained since then with the Technology Services Fee. Portions of support-staff compensation related to Distance Education services are also funded through the Distance Education and Technology Services Fees.

[Blackboard](#) and all of the campus online software services are made available 24 hours a day throughout the year other than scheduled routine maintenance. Enterprise software, such as Blackboard and our ERP software, is hosted by the [Texas State Data Center Services](#). Texas Data Center Services provides managed services, including IT security, business continuity and disaster recovery to twenty-eight state agencies through a shared governance structure. The high-availability model is serviced by two consolidated data centers, one of which is located on the ASU campus. ASU has an interagency agreement with the Data Center which provides ASU "in kind" services in exchange for their use of an ASU facility. The agreement covers [Gold Level service](#) on all of our production systems including Blackboard and our ERP system.

During fiscal year 2012, the Blackboard system performed at over 99.95% uptime. The high uptime for Blackboard is achieved by having a robust production system. Two redundant Blackboard application servers are load-balanced to provide fast response time even during periods of high usage. The servers are also configured for high-availability, meaning that if one server goes down unexpectedly, the other server will automatically take over the full load without any outage. The system and data are backed up nightly to tape which is then stored off-campus. Disaster Recovery planning and testing is performed annually for Blackboard.

In addition to the production system, ASU also has a test system of Blackboard where we post new software versions and maintenance updates before going live. We follow an established Change Management process which follows ITIL best practices where we require a certain level of testing before going live with any system modification. Major software updates go through a process where they are tested by a pilot group of faculty for a defined period of time before being approved for production. Minor updates, such as maintenance service packs, are also posted on the test system and go through a lighter testing process before going into production. ASU Internet services include two separate paths going out of the data center such that if there is a fiber cut on one of the paths, the other will automatically assume the full load.

A primary goal in the Information Technology (IT) strategic plan is to "deliver integrated information services to enable customers to access the information they need, when and where they need it" which is the foundation for IT promoting that all applicable services be made available in a web-based environment. Current online services allow students to check current course offerings, register for classes, check grades, pay tuition, check financial aid status, purchase books, meet the President, see a video archive of university wide events, submit applications, and access library services from any location in the world. IT continues to increase the list of online services. As an example, IT recently completed a project which extends the campus tutoring services to online learners.

The Information Technology Service Center is the first line of technological support for faculty, students, and staff and is also available 24 hours a day throughout the year. Support requests may be submitted by phone, e-mail, or online. To increase the effectiveness of Distance Education support, the Service Center uses remote access software to review individual technical issues and provide an efficient resolution to the customer.