Information Technology Task Force
Academic Policy Recommendations for Electronic Mediated Courses

In formulation of recommendations regarding academic policies and procedures, the Task Force was guided by principles adapted from the American Council on Education on Distance Learning, April 1997, and the definition of distributed learning provided by the Institute for Academic Technology, University of North Carolina (DEOS-L listserv, 1995, A.W. Bates, *Managing Technological Change*, 2000).

Five Guiding Principles for Distance Learning

- There is no one best instructional delivery and interaction media or method. Media and methods are selected for their contribution to the achievement of the learning outcome in a given situation.
- A true learning community is interactive where participants have the opportunity to engage information, their teacher and their fellow students.
- All learning environments, traditional and virtual, are important to the university and will be cared for.
- A systems approach to instructional design will be modeled.
- Technology is a tool that enables distance and distributed learning to occur.

Distributed Learning

" A distributed learning environment is a learner-centered approach to education, which integrates a number of technologies to enable opportunities for activities and interaction in both asynchronous and real-time modes. The model is based on blending a choice of appropriate technologies with aspects of campus-based delivery, open learning systems, and distance education. The approach gives instructors the flexibility to customize learning environments to meet the needs of diverse student populations, while providing both high-quality and cost-effective learning."

Distribute learning thus encompasses the full range of technological applications to teaching, from its use as an audiovisual aid in the traditional classroom, through delivery using mixed modalities with classroom presentation, to full offering of a program to nonresident, individual learners.

The Task Force submits these statements for electronic courses/categories, technology and course management requirements, and policies for discussion and consideration by the academic deans and the appropriate academic affairs approval bodies.

1. Definitions of Electronic Courses/Categories

Technologies such as World Wide Webs page, threaded discussions, bulletin boards, and e-mail may be integrated in any course offered at UT. Students who enroll in UT classes are expected to have access to computers and the Internet and possess basic skills in e-mail, word processing and web-browsing. Ports are provided on campus in classrooms, labs and residence halls. A limited number of computers are available on campus in labs for student use. Students should be so notified of these expectations and provisions in the University's catalogs and timetables.

Three categories of electronic courses are proposed. These courses should be identified as such in the Master (term) Timetable, a proposed online Timetable, and by category and term from the student service portal, **Circle Park On-line**, www.cpo.utk.edu.

- Technology-Enhanced Course (TE)
- Tennessee Online Course (TN)
- Correspond Online Course (CO)

Technology-Enhanced Course (TE-course)
Technology-enhanced courses (TE-courses) are delivered using a hybrid of modalities. While these courses generally do not require regularly scheduled classroom attendance, residence sessions may be required for examinations or to conduct labs, seminars or provide specialized instruction as appropriate to the course. These courses have highly interactive online learning activities with a cohort group, including discussion, group projects, or other exercises that stimulate critical thinking and concept application. The student will complete the course requirements and keep in touch with the instructor and classmates using a variety of communication modes including, for example, e-mail, interactive compressed video conferencing, videotapes, computer and video conferencing, Internet/World Wide Web resources, printed materials, Postal service, Fax, and telephone.

Course information regarding delivery modality(s), technology and computer competency requirements, weekly online commitments, and scheduled residency or synchronous class sessions will be available via hot-link from the online master (term) Timetable.

These courses have specific start and end dates, generally within the traditional semester framework. The faculty/institution have primary control over the pace of the course. The courses carry the same academic credits as traditional courses offered in a face-to-face format and may be used toward total credit hours for tuition purposes.

Tennessee Online Courses (TN-course)
Tennessee Online courses are those that use web-based components to their course as the principle means of distributing information and creating and managing interaction. Communication and interaction is via e-mail and discussion forums with an instructor and cohort group. Highly interactive online activities are carried out in an asynchronous format, meaning students can log on to, read and post online messages at any time during the defined activity period. Class attendance is not required. These courses generally follow the University calendar and meet the same credit stipulations as on-campus courses.

Correspond Online Course (CO-course)

Students may enroll at any time through the Department of Independent Study for Correspond Online courses. Students begin work on the course and progress through assignments in a self-paced, mode, giving them primary control over the pace, time and location of the course. Though traditionally print-based in format, assignments and courses materials for the self-paced Correspond Online courses may be delivered and submitted via e-mail or the Internet as well as by Fax, Postal or courier service. Final examinations must be taken under supervision at an approved testing site. Program requirements dictate if, or how many, of the self-paced courses are accepted toward the degree. These courses are subject to the same policies as the traditional correspondence courses.

2.   Timetables

All Technology-Enhanced and Tennessee Online courses will be designated in the University's master (term) Timetable with an appropriate descriptor (e.g. TE). Students shall be advised to refer to an online master (term) Timetable for course information regarding delivery modality(s) of TE courses, technology and computer competency requirements, weekly online commitments, and scheduled residency or synchronous class sessions, if any. Course information (in standard format) for each Technology-Enhanced course will be available via hot-link from the online master (term) Timetable.

Additionally, a link to a web site with list, by term, of all Technology-Enhanced (TE), Tennessee Online (TN), and Correspond Online (CO) courses will be provided at a common portal, **Circle Park Online**, www.cpo.utk.edu.

3.   Definition of Time Commitment

Graduate policies currently require that the number of contact hours should never be fewer than the equivalent of one hour per week during the term for each hour of credit awarded, (i.e. 15 hours per semester hour); for every contact hour, there should be at least two hours of student preparation; and that for each hour of graduate credit under the semester system, there should be a minimum elapsed time of one week. These requirements are designed to allow for substantive and meaningful interaction between the faculty member and student. Contact Hours has traditionally meant that students and instructors were face-to-face at a common geographical site. In the distributed learning environment, this will be replaced by courses requiring a hybrid of delivery styles.

The Task Force recommends defining Time Commitment for Technology-Enhanced and Tennessee Online courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, in place of Contact Hours currently used for traditional face-to-face graduate courses. Further, for a 3-credit hour course, students would be expected to commit at least 9 hours per week in reading, group discussion, and application exercises for an asynchronous electronic course.

4.   Computer Literacy Requirements

UT students must be familiar with current technologies and possess basic computer literacy skills in e-mail, word processing and web-browsing. Computer-based diagnostic tests will be available to help students assess competency levels and direct them to appropriate online or face-to-face modular instruction. Computer-based training will be made available by Information Infrastructure to provide the basic skills (such as computing fundamentals, Internet fundamentals, and distance learning techniques) students need to enroll in credit courses at this University. Students will be made aware that faculty teaching these courses will not provide support or help time with topics covered in the fundamental courses (such as using browsers). Computer labs and support will be provided for training faculty and students in the University supported course management software, currently Blackboard's CourseInfo.

5.   Computer Accounts

All students must have access to a computer with Internet access, a web browser (variety, version, and configuration as required by course), an e-mail account, and other software necessary to complete course requirements. A limited number of computers are available on campus in labs for student use. All enrolled students are given a student computer account. However, students may designate an alternate e-mail account in the UT online directory.

6.   Hardware/Software Requirement

The hardware and software required for a course will be stated in the online timetable and course syllabus. Students registering for classes must have access to the required hardware and software.

Minimum technical requirements for the computer to be useful to students, and supported through Information Infrastructure, will be discussed with students during orientation and published online. Unless otherwise specified, the courses will make use of the University supported course management software, currently Blackboard's CourseInfo, as a collaborative discussion tool, available free to all students and academic teaching staff. Some courses may have specific technical requirements in addition to the minimum indicated.

7.   Examinations

Issues regarding the administration and supervision of students during examinations and validation of the student's identity are major issues with point-to-point delivery of courses. Traditional policies, whether written or understood, have typically assumed face-to-face contact when the student is being tested.

If faculty teaching electronic courses choose to give written examinations, students will need access to a proctored examination site, whether on-campus or off. If exams are to be taken off-campus, it is the responsibility of the faculty member to coordinate scheduling with the Department of Distance Education and Independent Study. Students will be responsible for paying any fees required by the proctors. In some cases, the student may be given the

opportunity to propose a proctor for institutional approval. Identification is required for all students taking proctored examinations. Security of examinations is an issue from the time each examination leaves the instructor's hands until it is delivered back to the instructor for grading. As appropriate, faculty may adopt alternative forms of assessment that are more suitable for the flexible learning environment.

8.   Approvals

All new courses submitted for approval by academic units to the Undergraduate or Graduate Council for approval must indicate that the instructional techniques are appropriate to the outcomes of each course. Only when a change in delivery modality or format of the course results in a change in the course description, must a request for approval again be submitted to the appropriate Council.

To designate a course approved for undergraduate or graduate credit in the master (term) Timetable as a Technology-Enhanced or Tennessee Online course requires approval of the dean/director of the academic unit. Undergraduate or Graduate Council approval is not required.

All distance learning programs i.e. programs totally delivered at a distance to individual or cohort groups of learners, must be submitted to the Undergraduate or Graduate Council for approval.

9.   Residence Requirement

The institutional policy mandating a period of on-campus attendance as a condition of eligibility for a degree may not accommodate students in a distributed learning environment. The UT Knoxville campus currently requires a minimum of two consecutive semesters of residence for the doctoral degree. Residence requirements are designed to assure that the student has ample opportunity for direct access to the campus faculty, facilities and services. With telemediated courses, video conferencing, asynchronous and synchronous web-based modes for allowing student and faculty interactions, and electronic access to library databases and computer resources, the student is no longer required to be physically located at a specific geographical site to have direct access to campus faculty and resources to meet the intent of the residence policy. Graduate School policy should reflect this change.