

(Under Review)

**Policies and Procedures
For
Distance Learning @ Alcorn State University**

**Prepared by:
Distance Learning Committee**

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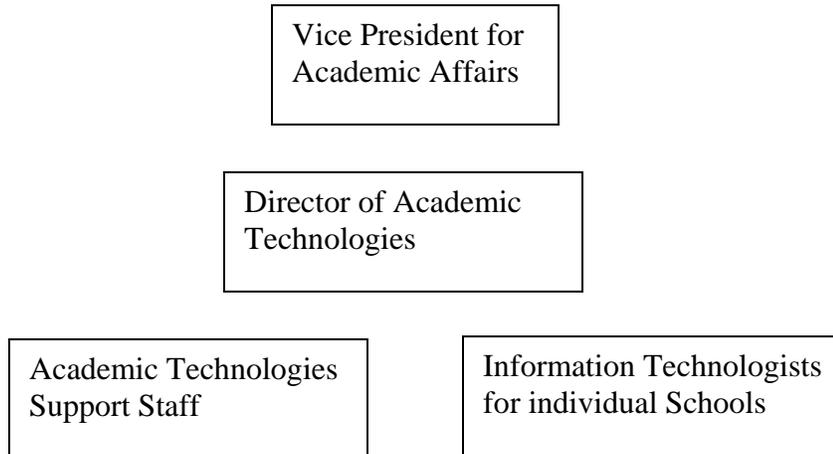
Office of Academic Technologies

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Overview of Academic Technologies at ASU

Distance learning component of Academic Affairs at Alcorn State University is supported by the Office of Academic Technologies. The following chart shows the organizational structure of the Office of Academic Technologies.



The purpose of Office of Academic Technologies at ASU is to “Assist the University in ensuring that faculty use the instruction and information technologies effectively in achieving student learning outcomes and that all students enrolled at the University are competent in using information technologies that are prevalent in the workplace and in graduate and professional schools.”

Distance Learning at ASU includes synchronous and asynchronous modes of instruction. Synchronous mode of instruction is performed through web conferencing technology called Elluminate Live! where as the asynchronous mode of instruction is performed through Blackboard Online Course Server (blackboard.alcorn.edu).

The training for utilizing the academic technologies at Alcorn State University is provided by the Office of Academic Technologies. Professional development workshops may be scheduled by contacting the staff of Academic Technologies through email (blackboard@alcorn.edu) or by phone (601-877-6142) during normal working hours. After-hours technical support can be obtained by calling 601-877-4190 from 5.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.

The Academic Technologies Support Center (ATSC) located in Room# 136 of Simmons Technology Building (next to the Radio Station) is currently undergoing renovations. Upon completion, ATSC will accommodate one hundred computers including Windows, Apple and Linux machines. Poster and regular printing services will also be available to students and faculty members.

Best Practices indicated by SACS

The Office of Academic Technologies adheres to the best practices for offering electron degrees and certificate programs as identified by Commission on Colleges Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/commadap.pdf>)

The *Best Practices* are divided into five separate components, each of which addresses a particular area of institutional activity relevant to distance education. They are:

1. Institutional Context and Commitment
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. Faculty Support
4. Student Support
5. Evaluation and Assessment

Institutional Context and Commitment

The Distance Learning /Online Course Delivery program is consistent with the Institution's role and mission.

<http://www.alcorn.edu/about/mission.htm>

It also aligns with the University's five year strategic plan (2009-2013)

<http://www.alcorn.edu/about.htm>

1. Online programs take the University beyond its institutional boundaries and allow it to serve geographically distant students and educate non-traditional full-time working students
2. The University assures the student that the program will be sustained long enough for the cohort to complete it
3. Office of Academic Technologies at ASU is responsible for supporting the faculty and students participating in electronically offered programs. It consists of fully qualified and trained personnel required to support online programs. Technical and physical facilities are provided by the ASU campus infrastructure.
4. Online courses and programs should have a consistent and coherent technical framework for students and faculty. Faculty members are encouraged to attend workshops conducted on regular basis or request a one-on-one session by simply completing an online form. <http://www.alcorn.edu/acadtech/1on1/>
5. The University provides students with reasonable technical support for each educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in the program.
6. All ASU online/distance learning programs will adhere to the legal and regulatory requirements including services for those with disabilities and copyright law.

Curriculum and Instruction

Standards for curriculum and instruction are already established at ASU and approved by accrediting agencies. These policies will be strictly enforced as methods of course delivery may change but standards of quality should be persistent. The important issues are curriculum-driven and pedagogical and should be made by qualified professionals and focus on learning outcomes for an increasingly diverse student population. The policy statements listed in this section reflect the Office of Academic Technologies' commitment to high quality Curriculum and Instruction:

1. Each program or course of study results in collegiate level learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree and certificate awarded by the Institution.
2. Academically qualified persons participate fully in the decisions concerning program curricula, oversight, presentation, management and assessment.
3. The University provides a coherent plan for the student to access all courses necessary to complete the online program. It clearly indicates services that are not available online and which may require on-campus student presence.
4. The contractual agreements will be approved by the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services, thereby assuring of quality with primary consideration given to enhancing services offered to students.
5. Programs and courses offered online will have appropriate interaction between the faculty and student; and student and student. Various synchronous and asynchronous technologies will be utilized to ensure adequate and quality interaction.

Faculty Support

Faculty roles are becoming increasingly diverse and recognized. For example: the same person may not perform both the tasks of course development and direct instruction to students. The following section highlights Office of Academic Technologies commitment to providing excellent Faculty Support and ensuring that all their needs are met:

1. The Institution provides professional development workshops and support to all faculty members utilizing distance learning technologies
2. Orientation and training is provided to all individuals involved in program/course development and those working directly with students so that they are proficient in utilizing the various academic technologies that will be required to deliver the course/program.

Student Support

Twenty-first century students are different, both demographically and geographically, from students of previous generations. These differences affect everything from admission policy to library services. Reaching these students and serving them appropriately are major challenges facing today's institutions.

1. The University provides administrative, financial, and technical commitment to continue the distance learning program so that it will allow a cohort of students to complete a degree in a publicized timeframe.
2. The University informs the student about the required technical competence for participating in the distance learning program.
3. <http://www.alcorn.edu/acadtech/pageFAQ.aspx>
4. The Office of Academic Technologies ensures that ongoing technical support is available to students during normal working hours and evenings via phone, email and Internet.
5. The ASU Ecampus currently being implemented will ensure that the students enrolled in distance learning programs will receive all information related to financial aid, student services, placement services among others via the Internet.

Evaluation and Assessment

As new techniques and technologies evolve, assessment of student achievement, student and faculty satisfaction and evaluation of the program/course have added importance as it will determine if the distance learning programs are meeting their objectives. The results from such assessments and evaluation will act as a guide for enhancing current programs and while developing new distance learning programs/courses.

1. Office of Academic Technologies will assist faculty members in providing assessment, and will assist students in participating in the assessment.
2. Office of Academic Technologies will collaborate Departments in assuring that personal information is protected while conducting assessments and disseminating results.
3. Office of Academic Technologies will conduct self-evaluation to identify more effective uses of technology that can be used by faculty members to improve pedagogy, achieving student learning outcomes, improving retention rates, and making effective use of resources.

Procedure to be followed before utilizing Distance Learning Technologies

Fully/partially Online Courses:

To create a web-based course, you should:

1. Attend a Learning Management System training session.
2. Contact the Academic Technologies support staff to ensure that equipment needed to deliver online courses is available.
3. Contact the Academic Technologies support staff to assist you in developing material for online courses.
4. Contact the Academic Technologies support staff and ensure that all registered students for the course are informed about the requirements for online courses.
 - a. Request student workshops during class hours
 - b. Request student username/password by providing class roster
5. Contact Academic Technologies support staff to implement the course, if needed.

To create a web-based program, Department/School should:

1. Decide to offer an online program through the strategic planning process working with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean.
2. Contact Director of Academic Technologies to begin planning for and coordinating program development.
3. Request faculty members to attend professional development workshops and develop online courses.
4. Contact the Academic Technologies support staff to ensure that equipment needed to deliver online courses is available.
5. Contact Academic Technologies to implement online courses.
6. Work with Academic Technologies to ensure that the Department/School website is updated so that prospective students are informed about the requirements before registering in online programs.
7. Ensure that online programs are meeting the appropriate quality standards set by the University.

To enroll in distance learning courses/programs, students should:

1. Have a valid email address. The University will provide a new email address once registration is completed.
2. Have a computer with sufficient network bandwidth to participate in online classes. It is recommended that you have cable or DSL connection.
3. Install the necessary software such as MS-Office, COREL, JAVA. Most faculty members use MS-Office, Corel Wordperfect, Adobe, file formats. Java is necessary to participate for real-time audio/video participation.
4. Read the FAQ section of this guide for more information.
5. Contact the Office of Academic Technologies if you need assistance in setting up an email address, purchasing a computer or ensuring that your computer has all the necessary software.

Guidelines for students residing in residence halls or in close proximity to the University:

Faculty members may require such students to meet in the classroom during normal class hours. In such cases, students are **REQUIRED** to be present in the classroom. Students can participate in the online class from their residence halls only if allowed to do so by the instructor. If the residence halls do not have network connectivity, students are required to go to the classroom. **LACK OF NETWORK CONNECTIVITY AND THEREBY MISSING A CLASS WILL RESULT IN LOSS OF ATTENDANCE.**

Lab Assignments: Courses usually have a lab component. Faculty members may require students to be present in the labs located on-campus to complete the lab assignments or in similar locations off-campus where proper facilities are available. In such cases, the instructor will provide directions for submitting assignments.

Guidelines for off-campus students:

In online course/program, off-campus students should have access to computer with sufficient network bandwidth. It is recommended that the students purchase their own computer if they plan to complete an online degree/course. Office of Academic Technologies support staff can assist such students in ensuring that the computer they plan to purchase is meeting the minimum requirements to participate in online classes.

Off-campus students will be provided with a username/password to login and participate online classes. If the student does not receive this information, it is his/her responsibility to contact the instructor by phone or email. They can also contact the Department or Office of Academic Technologies to receive this information. **ALL UNIVERSITY RELATED CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR WILL BE DONE THROUGH ALCORN PROVIDED EMAIL ADDRESS. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STUDENT TO ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THIS EMAIL. YOU MAY CONFIGURE YOUR PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESS TO RECEIVE ALCORN EMAILS.**

Guidelines for under-graduate classes:

Under-graduate classes should utilize distance learning technologies as a tool to enhance student learning outcomes by using it to supplement classroom teaching. **BY NO MEANS SHOULD IT BE USED AS A SOLE SOURCE OF INSTRUCTION DELIVERY MECHANISM UNLESS IT IS APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY AND IHL.** If used efficiently, distance learning technologies can act as an excellent tool for creating supplementary study material.

Quick start for students in Distance Learning:

1. Ensure that the program/course you choose is offered online. The location for an online course is “Web based”.
2. It is important that you meet with an advisor and ensure that distance learning is a right fit for your schedule and academic goals.
3. Register for online courses. Ensure that you select web based courses only to avoid problems later if you plan to take all your courses online.
4. Contact the Office of Academic Technologies to receive your Blackboard username/password.
5. Login to the learning management system and ensure that the courses you have registered for are listed in your account.
<http://blackboard.alcorn.edu>
6. Faculty members usually post the syllabus, textbook information and related material one to two weeks before classes begin. Make sure that you are familiar with the Blackboard environment and that your computer has the necessary software before the first day of class.
7. Distance learning classes, especially those using Elluminate Live! meet on the same day when the regular ASU semester begins unless otherwise indicated in the schedule.

All University related email will be sent to your Alcorn provided email address. You should check your emails at <http://mail.alcorn.edu>. Username/password for Blackboard and email is the same.

8. Ensure that your fees are paid by the due date. Your account will be disabled if the fees are not paid by the due date.

Degree programs offered online at Alcorn State University:

1. B.S. in General Studies
2. R.N.-B.S.N.
3. Master of Science in Nursing
4. Master of Science in Workforce Development

New programs are added on regular basis. Please call the Office of Admissions at 601-877-6100 for the most current information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the advantages of distance learning?

Advantages:

1. Flexibility – Distance learning courses can be accessed anytime of the day. Courses using Elluminate Live! will require students to join the class during assigned class hours.
2. Cost – Students do not have to spend money on commuting to classes.
3. Time – Apart from time saved from traveling, students have access to course material 24/7.
4. Continuing education – Gives students an option for continuing their education while continuing other activities like jobs, child rearing, etc.
5. Communication – Courses utilizing Elluminate Live! allow real-time communication with the Instructor in audio/video format.

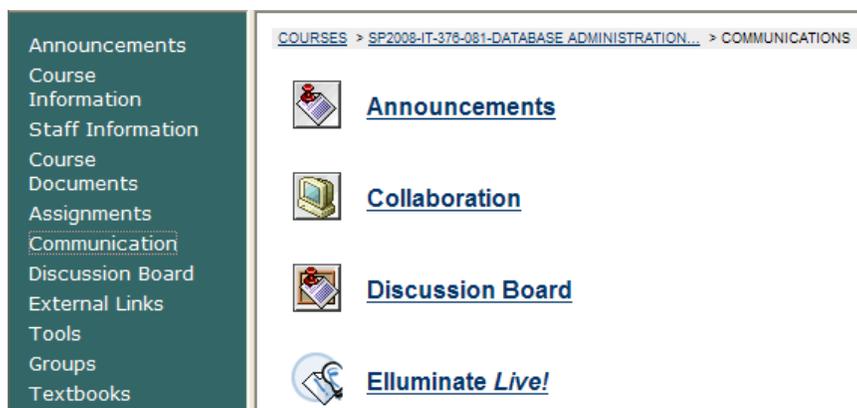
What is Blackboard? How do I know if my course is using Blackboard?

Blackboard is a Web-based course-management system designed to allow student and faculty to participate in classes delivered online or use online materials and activities to complement face-to-face teaching. Blackboard enables instructors to provide students with course materials, discussion boards, virtual chat, online quizzes, among other options.

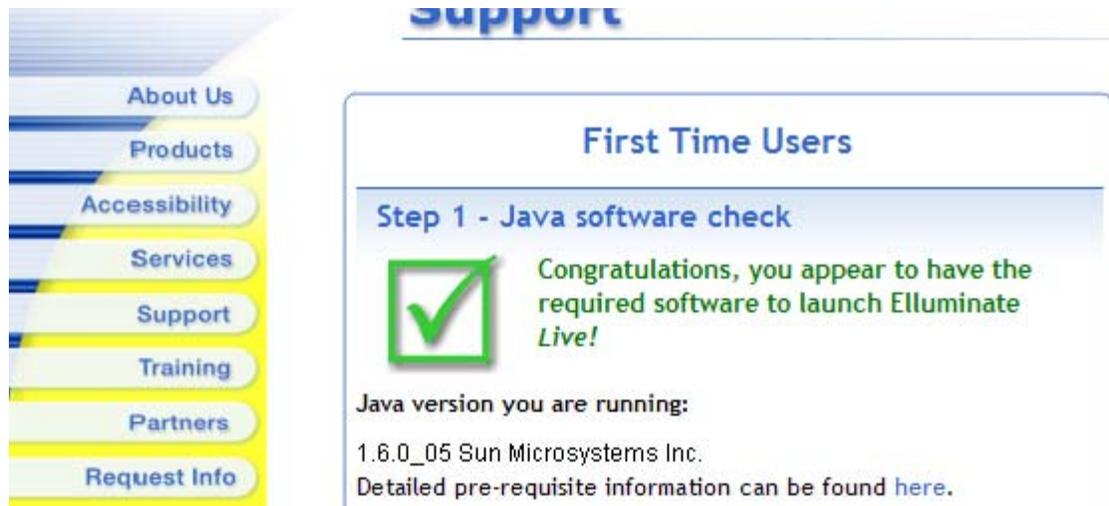
All web based courses will use Blackboard. The courses you have registered for, will appear in your account and can be seen after logging into the server.

What is Elluminate Live!? How do I know if my course is using Elluminate Live!?

Elluminate Live! allows interactive real-time communication using audio and video formats between students and instructor. It is located in the Communication section of the course.



Elluminate Live! does not require any special software installed on your computer except Java. You can confirm if your computer is compatible with Elluminate Live! by going to the following website.



What do I need to register for Online Classes?

1. Ensure that the courses you are interested in are offered online.
2. Register for the course well in advance.
3. Select proper equipment (See compatible equipment section).
4. Ensure that you have enough network bandwidth (see Bandwidth requirements section).
5. Ensure that the necessary software plugins are downloaded and installed before classes begin.
6. Ensure that username and password is provided to log into the system.

Which equipment is compatible?

- Most computer manufacturers provide computer systems that are ready for distance learning. The following configuration is a guideline for purchasing a new computer or upgrading an existing computer:

1. CPU speed: 2.0 GHz or greater
2. RAM: 1 GB
3. Hard-drive: 100 GB
4. Network Interface Card: Gigabit Ethernet & Wireless Network Card
5. Modem as backup
6. Sound Card: Full Duplex sound card is preferable
7. Headset
8. Operating System: Windows XP or other compatible operating system

- If you are planning to purchase a new computer, ensure that it is Windows Vista operating system compatible (Boot Camp capable for Apple products).

What are the bandwidth requirements (internet speed)?

- Most of the software works over the slowest network links such as dialup (56k modem) connections but it is recommended to have a DSL or any other high-bandwidth connection to ensure satisfactory results and uninterrupted connections.

What are the browser requirements?

1. Internet Explorer 5.1 (or higher) for the Mac OS
2. Internet Explorer 5 (or higher) for Windows
3. Netscape 4.7 (or higher) for Mac OS
4. Netscape 4.7 (or higher) for Windows
5. Mozilla Firefox 1.0.7 or 1.5 (or higher) for Windows
6. Opera 7.0 (or higher) for Windows

Do I have sufficient skills to participate in online classes?

- Following guidelines were taken from the Mississippi E-Campus:
If you have the majority of skills listed below, then you are ready for online learning. It's that simple.

1. I can turn on and shut down my computer
2. I can connect to the Internet
3. I can contact my Internet service provider for technical assistance
4. I can use a mouse to click, double-click, drag and drop
5. I can use a word processing program (ex. Microsoft Word) to enter text
6. I can use a file manager to find and save files
7. I can use a file compression program (e.g. WinRar or WinZip)
8. I can start software programs such as web browsers (e.g. Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer)

Our own additions:

1. Can upload and download files from the Internet
2. Can send documents as attachments in email.

Can I get any help with buying new pc or laptop?

- If you plan to purchase a new computer, Office of Academic Technologies can assist you configuring a computer online that will meet the above requirements.
- If you have an existing PC or laptop, we can also assist you in ensuring that it has all the necessary software plugins required for online classes.

How do I login into Blackboard?

1. Go to <http://blackboard.alcorn.edu>
2. Click on login
3. Enter your username and password

Contact Office of Academic Technologies if you have any problem in this process.
email: blackboard@alcorn.edu
Phone: 601-877-6142

Will the instructor know how often I login to the course?

Yes, the instructor can obtain this information from the “Course Statistics” page of the course on Blackboard. The instructor can also see the areas of the course students are visiting.

The instructor will determine the date and time the assignment was submitted as it is recorded at the time of submission.

Whom do I contact for help regarding Blackboard?

You should contact the Office of Academic Technologies for assistance related to Blackboard. Phone: 601-877-6142; Email: blackboard@alcorn.edu
Online technical support is available at <http://www.alcorn.edu/acadtech>