



Susan Cochran
Telephone: (510) 987-0887
Email: susan.cochran@ucop.edu

*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
Faculty Representative to the Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

July 14, 2023

KATHERINE S. NEWMAN
PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Re: Standard Terminology Guide for Distance Education Courses

Dear Provost Newman:

At its June 28 meeting, the Academic Council endorsed the attached glossary of standard terminology related to distance education courses. The glossary was developed jointly by the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) and the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA).

The guide provides clear and standardized definitions, drawing from accrediting agencies and federal guidelines, to bring a shared understanding of these terms. It does not aim to replace existing campus terms and definitions; however, we know that inconsistencies in definitions of terms across campuses has, at times, led to confusion.

The Council agrees that the glossary can help faculty ensure quality in online education by supporting a uniform approach through common language. As noted, the Senate does not intend to impose the definitions on the divisions or preclude them from using alternatives for their own policies and decisions. UCEP intends to update this document regularly to adapt to new technologies and circumstances.

We ask your help in transmitting the glossary to the graduate deans at the campuses.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Cochran".

Susan Cochran, Chair
Academic Council

Cc: Academic Council
Senate Division Executive Directors
Chief of Staff Beechem
Executive Director Lin

STANDARD TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO DISTANCE COURSES
Created by representatives from UCEP and CCGA, May 3rd, 2023.

The following terms will be used by systemwide committees. This set of systemwide definitions does not preclude individual campuses from employing alternative terminology for their own policies and decisions.

DEFINITIONS

Distance education: a mode of instruction in which some or all students are physically separated from the instructor. Includes online and hybrid courses. Federal regulations and [WSCUC/WASC](#) require courses in distance education programs to offer faculty-initiated regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors.

Substantive interaction: Faculty must engage students in at least two of the following:

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; and
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(From WSCUC/WASC [substantive change manual](#).)

Courses can be classified according to the mode of instruction:

- **In-person course:** Has an assigned physical classroom. Primary instruction contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture) take place in person. May include occasional online contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture), whether synchronous or asynchronous.
- **Online course:** Does not have an assigned physical classroom. All primary instruction contact hours (primary course activity, i.e., lecture) take place online. Format may be synchronous, asynchronous, or both.
- **Hybrid course:** Has an assigned physical classroom. Primary instruction consists of both in-person contact hours and intentional and regular online contact hours, whether synchronous or asynchronous.

- **Mixed enrollment course:** Requires a physical classroom for some but not all students. Some students receive instruction in person; others, online.

A **hybrid course**, for approval and accreditation purposes, can be further classified based on instructional contact hours.

The definition of **instructional contact hours** is:

Time spent in lecture, seminar, lab, discussion section, etc., with the instructor of record. Instructional contact hours are equivalent to the number of hours per week for which a room would be scheduled for an in-person version of this course. Does not include office hours, final examinations, or interactions with teaching assistants (see WASC).

A hybrid course is classified according to the fraction of primary instructional contact time that occurs in person:

- **Hybrid in-person courses** are hybrid courses in which 50% or more of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person.
- **Hybrid online courses** are hybrid courses in which less than 50% of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person.

Distance education courses are those in which less than 50% of instructional contact hours are designed to be in-person for some or all students. This category encompasses online and hybrid online – these two subcategories are treated similarly in accreditation and approval processes.

Programs may be classified as an **in-person program**, **online program**, or **hybrid program** according to the mix of course types. WASC considers online programs and some hybrid programs to be distance education.

- **Multiple-modality programs** are programs with specific course offerings that may be in different modalities, such as online, hybrid, or in-person. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid,” but rather as “multiple-modality.”
- **Joint degree programs** involve more than one department or school. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid.”
- **Dual-degree programs** involve more than one degree, e.g., MD/PhD. Such programs should not be described as “hybrid.”

Teaching format is defined as how course material is presented:

- **In person** is content delivered in-person in real time.
- **Synchronous** is online content delivered remotely in real time.
- **Asynchronous** is online content available online and not delivered in real time (e.g., prerecorded).

POLICY NOTES

Courses that allow some students to enroll with the expectation of online instruction and some with the expectation of in-person instruction (sometimes termed “hy-flex”) count as **online** or **online hybrid** as long as the online students will receive less than 50% of instruction in-person.

Online courses may still require students be provided a physical space to attend any synchronous classes. This need has been especially noted with online courses taken by undergraduate students who live on campus and lack a suitable workspace where they live and/or by students who take both online and other courses that fall on the same day, requiring them to be on campus for the in-person course(s).

We recommend the following **terms no longer be used**:

- **Hybrid enrollment**: Has been used to refer to courses where some students participate in contact hours exclusively online (and register accordingly) and some students participate in person (and register accordingly). The same content is delivered to students whether they participate online or in person. However, due to the use of “hybrid” to describe teaching modalities, it is recommended to use “mixed enrollment” instead.
- **Remote course**: Can be used to describe a method of participating or working in a course, but not to describe a course.

These definitions will likely evolve over the next few years.