DISTANCE EDUCATION

I. PURPOSE

Describes distance education use, organizational process, and approval process.

II. DEFINITIONS

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) defines distance education as “a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD’s, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance education course or program.”

Wharton County Junior College currently provides students with the opportunity to enhance their educational experience through the distance education in the following formats:

- **ITV** - ITV provides instructional content through a two way video communication network. It provides real-time face-to-face instruction between the instructor and students at multiple locations. In most instances ITV courses are also web-enhanced, requiring students actively engage in an online component. This may include elements such as the submission of assignments, online testing and/or participation in discussion boards.

- **Internet** - Internet courses are conducted almost, if not entirely (85-100%) online. Some instructors may require that students come to campus for orientations, field trips, or to take exams in an approved testing location.

- **Hybrid** - Hybrid courses combine online learning and face-to-face instruction. These courses provide 50 to 85% of class instruction in an online setting. The remainder of the instruction (15-50%) takes place in traditional face-to-face setting.

III. POLICY

In keeping with the college's mission, distance education may be used as general education or specialized course electives, as part of academic programs, or to fill special community needs. All courses must have the approval of discipline faculty, the division chair, the Director of Distance Education and the Vice President of Instruction, and must be equivalent in content and quality to on-campus courses.

(POLICY APPROVAL: 9-20-95, Board of Trustees, amended 7-15-14)

IV. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

A. Accrediting Agencies

With respect to distance education, WCJC shall conform to:

1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) “Best Practices For Electronically Offered Degree & Certificate Programs”

2. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s (THECB) “Principles of Good Practice for
B. Out of State Offerings

If WCJC offers postsecondary education through distance or correspondence education to students in a state in which it is not physically located or in which it is otherwise subject to state jurisdiction as determined by the state, the institution must meet any state requirements for it to be legally offering postsecondary distance or correspondence education in that state. The institution must be able to document to the U.S. Secretary of Education the state's approval upon request. 34 C.F.R. 600.9(c)

C. Institutional Context and Commitment

1. Facilities and Finances

The Distance Education Department, under the supervision of the Vice President of Instruction, shall be the administrative unit responsible for ensuring administrative compliance with accreditation requirements, institutional requirements, acting as a liaison between the various groups involved with providing distance education for students, and ensuring appropriate equipment and technical expertise for Distance Education courses are available. The Distance Education Department also acts as a liaison with the Virtual College of Texas (VCT).

2. Review of Distance Education Procedures

The Director of Distance Education, under the supervision of the Vice President of Instruction, is responsible for evaluating and revising Distance Education Policies and Procedures with input from the Division Chairs and the Distance Education Advisory Committee.

D. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Academic Rigor of Courses

Distance Education courses are subject to the same policies and procedures as other WCJC courses in regard to syllabi, textbooks, grading, methods of evaluation, and learning outcomes (see Full Time and Part Time Instructor Procedures). Each course and program offered online results in appropriate learning outcomes. Distance Education program length shall be the same as the corresponding face-to-face, on-site program.

2. Academic Integrity

Wharton County Junior College verifies that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives credit by assigning each individual a secure login and passcode. The unique login assigned by the College is required to access Online Services which allows students to register for classes, view class schedules, grades, and transcripts, access financial aid documents, and pay tuition for classes. Web-based LMS, such as Blackboard, are used by the College to deliver distance education courses, and can only be accessed using the assigned login credentials. Every student is assigned a WCJC Google e-mail address based on the same unique log in credentials.

3. Oversight of Courses

The Vice President of Instruction (or designee) oversees Distance Education activities at WCJC. The Distance Education and Learning Technology Advisory Committee comprised of faculty and
staff members, meets regularly to identify and make recommendations regarding distance education issues at the college.

4. Course Development

The faculty holds primary responsibility for ensuring the rigor of Distance Education programs and the quality of instruction. The Distance Education Department regularly reviews distance education offerings against national standards of best practice for online course design and delivery. The process for approving new online or hybrid courses is as follows:

a. Instructor submits request / or is assigned to teach an online or hybrid course.
b. Online Course Development Form is completed. Course Pre-Development Approvals secured and forwarded to the Director of Distance Education.
c. Instructor must complete the required faculty training.
d. Instructor receives Certificate of Completion for required online training.
e. Instructor develops course.
f. Instructor submits course for review before applicable deadline.
g. Course Evaluation Report returned to instructor and department head.
h. Any required course revisions completed.
i. Director of Distance Education verifies that the course meets minimum requirements based on the course evaluation rubric.
j. Division Chair reviews documentation and gives final approval for online delivery.
k. Stipend (if applicable) paid.
l. Course periodically reviewed to maintain quality.

*(See WCJC Distance Education Faculty Handbook)*

5. Degree and Certificate Programs Offered Via Distance Education

Programs offered via distance education shall be consistent with the role and mission of WCJC and the offering Divisions. Programs shall be approved through the usual curriculum approval process. There shall be no distinction between programs offered through distance education and those offered on campus. Unless otherwise provided, all policies, standards, and guidelines for on-campus instruction apply to programs delivered via distance education.

Selection of programs to be offered via distance education is the purview of the appropriate Division, which shall provide oversight of the program to ensure currency of the program, its courses, and resources. Each program shall result in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree awarded.

E. Faculty

1. Qualifications for Full- and Part-Time Faculty
Only qualified faculty members, assigned by the appropriate department head, shall teach courses delivered via distance education. Assigned faculty shall have the same expertise, experience, rank, etc. as the faculty assigned to traditional classes.

2. Training

Faculty who teach through distance education technologies are responsible for acquiring sufficient technical skills to present their subject matter and related material effectively and, as necessary, for consulting with technical support personnel. Instructors must successfully complete training on the LMS and Best Practices prior to teaching an online or hybrid course. Additionally, the Distance Education Department is responsible for working with faculty members, and other relevant entities to develop and provide technical and pedagogical training for instructors who teach Distance Education courses. Trainings will be available in a variety of formats and cover a variety of topics relevant to distance education. (See WCJC Distance Education Faculty Handbook)

3. Teaching Load and Office Hours

When faculty teach courses to be offered via distance education, they may do so as part of their regularly assigned responsibilities to WCJC or as an overload. Distance Education faculty are expected to maintain the same number of office hours as traditional faculty. (See Full Time and Part Time Instructor Procedures)

4. Compensation

Faculty developing their first course to be offered via distance education, may be compensated at the established rate after the course has successfully completed the online course evaluation process. Subsequent course developments will not be compensated. Each development of a Master Course will be compensated at the established rate after the course has successfully completed the online course evaluation process for Master Courses and achieved an Exemplary rating. (See WCJC Distance Education Faculty Handbook)

5. Evaluation of Faculty

Full and part-time faculty (including online faculty) evaluations are conducted regularly to provide guidance and support to faculty to enhance the instructional process. The Program Director/Department Head and/or Division Chair will be given access to courses in the LMS to monitor and review as needed. In addition, students will complete faculty evaluations in their distance education courses each semester utilizing a DE appropriate evaluation form. (See Full Time and Part Time Instructor Procedures)

6. Evaluation of Courses

Evaluation of online and hybrid courses will be conducted on a regular basis. Based on the results of these evaluations, courses that do not meet the minimal accepted standards may be removed from the College’s online course offerings. If a course does not meet minimal accepted standards, the instructor must work with the DE department to make appropriate revisions, and receive approval that the course is now in compliance. If an instructor fails to comply with these guidelines before the beginning of the term, he/she may lose the opportunity to teach the course. (See WCJC Distance Education Faculty Handbook)

7. Intellectual Property
All Distance Education courses taught at WCJC should be developed through the College’s approved course development process. WCJC Regulation 276, Intellectual Property, Copyrights, and Inventions, defines intellectual property and ownership of instructional material.

8. Copyright

Faculty are expected to understand and adhere to the copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code), as updated by the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH Act) and with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Copyright law must be followed when performances, displays, copies or other reproductions of copyrighted material are made available to students. This includes the posting of copyrighted material on course management software or other online sites. Under the TEACH Act, it is permissible to make copyrighted materials available to students, providing that such materials (1) do not exceed an amount or duration comparable to that typically displayed in a live classroom setting; (2) are directly related to the course content; (3) are an integral part of the teaching content; (4) are intended solely for and are available only to students enrolled in the course; and (5) are retained only for the class session. The students must be notified that the materials may be subject to copyright protection.

F. Students

1. Academic Standards

Students enrolled in online courses are subject to the academic standards as students enrolled in traditional classes. Student conduct and responsibilities, including scholastic integrity, are outlined in the Student Handbook and College Catalog. (See WCJC Student Handbook and College Catalog)

2. Attendance

Interacting and participating in a Distance Education course is a different style of learning. Attendance is determined by a student’s active participation and communication in a course beginning the first week of classes. Signing into the LMS without participating in a substantive assignment or activity does not constitute attendance. Attendance is determined by the student’s active participation, regular and substantial interaction, communication and completion of competencies in the course (emails, discussion board, group projects, etc.). (See WCJC Distance Education Student Handbook and Full Time and Part Time Instructor Procedures)

3. Student Services

Students have access to appropriate services to support their learning including, but not limited to, library, bookstore, registration, testing, tutoring, and financial aid. It is the policy of Wharton County Junior College to administer all policies and practices in accordance with federal and state laws without discrimination against any qualified individual with a disability. Students with documented disabilities seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services in the Office of Student Services.

Distance education students shall have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support their successful completion of course work. These services will be comparable to those offered to traditional, on-campus users and should include all or most of the following: admissions, registration office, payment processing, bookstore, catalog, academic advising, technical assistance, withdrawal from courses, financial aid information, academic
calendar, services for disabled students (American Disabilities Act of 1990 accommodation), policies, procedures, and protocols for taking courses.

4. Library Support

WCJC ensures that all distance education students have access to library resources to support appropriately the courses in which the students are enrolled and to provide services that represent the closest approximations of those offered to on-campus students. These services include document delivery, electronic access to reference services, reserves, interlibrary loan, and a web page that includes ready links to services, contacts, and self-help modules.

5. Student Privacy Protection

All students enrolled at Wharton County Junior College, regardless of the mode of instructional delivery (traditional, ITV, hybrid, or online), are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). A written policy detailing the procedures in place for protecting the privacy of WCJC students can be found in Regulation 651, Student Records: Disclosure of Student Information and published for students in the WCJC Student Handbook. Additionally, instructors must limit electronic contact with students to WCJC issued accounts (i.e. WCJC student email and through Learning Management System) which require WCJC log-in credentials, and not communicate via other email or non WCJC credentialed accounts.

6. Notification of Student Fees

At the time of registration in any curriculum course, all students regardless of delivery method receive a registration statement which includes details on all charges associated with enrolled courses. Some courses within certain curriculum programs require additional fees for course materials. These fees are published in the college catalog and on the college website. WCJC does not charge a specific distance education fee and there are currently no additional fees associated with the verification of student identity.

G. Evaluation and Assessment

The Director of Distance Education along with the Distance Education and Learning Technologies committee is responsible for developing a plan to continually assess student success, retention, instruction, course design, and faculty and student satisfaction. The committee will also regularly review assessment data and provide recommendations for improvement to the Vice President of Instruction. Outcomes for effective provision of support services must include distance education students. Assessment data for effective provision of learning resources to distance education must be available and regularly evaluated and improved where appropriate.