



Distance Education  
Policies & Procedures Handbook

A Guide to Effective Distributed Teaching and Learning Strategies

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# Distance Education Mission

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## *Introduction*

Distance Education at Ranger College is a campus-wide resource for faculty members and departments interested in promoting teaching excellence, improving student learning outcomes, and encouraging ongoing professional development and scholarly engagement. Distance Education encourages and supports the innovative use of technology in teaching, advising, and mentoring students while emphasizing academic excellence within a supportive environment.

The Distance Education Policies & Procedures Handbook is intended to serve as a guide for faculty teaching:

- A. Hybrid courses – courses in which a majority of instruction is delivered in a structured alternative delivery format including, but not limited to, the Internet and/or other off-campus formats. Ranger College identifies hybrid courses with a “Hybrid” in the course schedule.
- B. Web courses (Online) – courses in which instruction is delivered entirely online through Blackboard or Canvas, learning management systems that use the Internet for delivery and interaction. Ranger College identifies Web courses with a “I” in the course schedule.

While this handbook is designed to assist faculty in developing and teaching Distance Education and blended courses, it does not replace nor supersede the Ranger College Catalog. If you have any questions about the policies and procedures for Distance Education, please feel free to contact your direct supervisor for further clarification or information.

## *Mission*

The mission of Distance Education at Ranger College is to facilitate and promote the creation and delivery of quality Distance Education courses to meet the continuous and changing educational needs of students served by the College.

## *Goal*

The goal of Distance Education is to offer the technology, flexibility, and opportunity that allow all students to excel. If you cannot find the answer to your Distance Education question on our [Ranger College website](#), contact the office of the Vice President of Instruction at 254-267-7090.

## ***Overview and Welcome***

Distance Education (DE) focuses on utilizing technology and teaching methods to provide an effective teaching and learning experience to students outside the regular classroom, increasing flexibility and scheduling options. **DE courses require that students have a computer and Internet access.** Additionally, DE courses require computer literacy and reading comprehension skills as well as self-discipline and motivation.

Students register for Distance Education courses in the same way they register for traditional courses. Visit the [Ranger College Webpage](#) for more information about the process.

Please take some time to familiarize yourself with this information. This is your guide for designing, delivering, and facilitating Distance Education classes and should be frequently referenced. Online instruction is hard work that requires a lot of time, but it can be very rewarding for both the faculty members and students if done well. Hopefully, this manual will be a great help with achieving that rewarding experience.

This is to be viewed as a dynamic document that will be updated as Distance Education grows and technology changes. Should you have any questions or concerns, contact your Division Chair.

# Federal Requirements

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## *State Authorization*

Some states require that out-of-state institutions be authorized within the state before delivering Distance Education courses or programs. Ranger College's state authorization status is available online via the Distance Education site's [State Authorization](#) page.

Ranger College joined the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) effective October 2021. Ranger College's compliance with state authorization requirements is managed by the President's Office.

## *Physical Presence*

The most frequently used factor in determining whether or not state authorization is required is a physical presence. The definition of a physical presence varies by state but typically includes attributes such as the institution's possession of a local address, local clinical or practicum requirements, local advertising, and local employees.

Ranger College has one main campus and 2 off-site centers, all of which are in Texas. Ranger College does periodically hire part-time Distance Education faculty who live outside of Texas. Ranger College's process for the hiring of part-time faculty is available online via the RC webpage.

For Transfer Programs, anyone with a Master's Degree and 18 graduate semester hours in an instructional discipline offered at Ranger College may apply to teach in that discipline. Upon receipt of all application materials, the information is sent to the appropriate academic department for evaluation. When part-time positions become available, the appropriate department chairperson selects the instructor. Faculty teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree must hold a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in the teaching discipline or a closely related discipline **OR** minimum of a baccalaureate degree in a non-related teaching discipline plus adequate related work or practical experience **AND/OR** sufficient undergraduate or graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline to demonstrate qualifications for teaching to the content and learning outcomes of the assigned courses **OR** an associate degree in the teaching discipline or a closely related discipline plus adequate related work or practical experience.

Upon selecting an instructor who lives outside of Texas, the department chair should contact the President's Office to verify whether hiring the individual will impact the College's State Authorization status for the state in which the instructor lives.

## *Distance Education Complaint Process for Out of State Students*

Ranger College desires to resolve student grievances, complaints and concerns in an expeditious, fair and amicable manner. Students residing outside the state of Texas who desire to resolve a grievance

regarding any Ranger College Web course(s) should follow the College's Student Grievance Procedure as outlined in the [Ranger College Catalog](#).

### *National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements*

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (NC-SARA) has developed a voluntary agreement for member states and U.S. territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance-education courses and programs. This agreement is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state.

#### *Key Points of SARA*

- SARA replaced the SREB's Electronic Campus Regional Reciprocity Agreement (SECRRRA) for state authorization in January 2016.
- SARA is voluntary for states and institutions.
- SARA is administered by the four regional education compacts that accept applications from states in their regions. Once states are approved, they can begin to enroll eligible institutions.
- Membership is open to degree-granting postsecondary institutions from all sectors (public colleges and universities; independent institutions, both non-profit and for-profit) accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
- Every college or university decides for itself whether to operate under SARA. Ranger College's SARA status is managed by the President's Office.

### *Attendance*

According to [34 CFR section 668.22](#), which addresses the treatment of Title IV funds, faculty members teaching an online course must record attendance within the first two weeks of class by demonstrating that students have participated in a face-to-face class activity or were otherwise engaged in an academically- related online activity.

Options to Comply with Attendance Requirement:

- Physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students
- Completion of an initial assignment regarding academic policies, introduction discussion board posting or graded assignment
- Submitting an academic assignment
- Completing an exam, an interactive tutorial, or computer-assisted instruction
- Attending a study group that is assigned by the institution
- Participating in an online discussion about academic matters
- Initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course

## Activities that Can NOT be used for Attendance

- Logging into an online class without active participation
- Participating in academic counseling or advisement

### *After Week 1*

After the first week, the student's "attendance record" should be based on the student's meeting course requirements such as submitting assignments or communicating with the instructor as outlined in the course syllabus. It is encouraged that students be given weekly assignments based on requirements stated in the course syllabus.

Weekly attendance is encouraged. If a student fails to submit a weekly assignment the instructor will send a warning e-mail to the student through their Ranger College email. (For dual credit students an email will also be sent to the counselor and the dual credit coordinator). Failure to officially withdraw from the course could result in a grade of F and adversely impact financial aid.

Options to comply with weekly attendance requirements include:

- Assignments
- Quizzes
- Discussions
- Exams

## ***Student Authentication***

The Federal Government requires institutions that offer distance education courses or programs to have processes in place to authenticate that the student who registers in such a course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and who receives the academic credit.

### *Secure Login*

To verify the identity of students accessing online resources, Ranger College assigns students a unique identification number. The ID is the login ID for a variety of online services offered through the College. To access student login information please visit the [RC Webpage](#).

## *Proctoring*

To receive credit for Distance Education courses, students are required to take a proctored examination.

### *Proctored Examinations*

A proctored exam is a supervised exam. Proctoring is a highly effective method for promoting academic integrity, authenticating students, and is an acceptable testing requirement for both hybrid and Web courses. Recommended proctoring solutions include:

- Traditional proctoring at Ranger College's Testing Centers
- Electronic surveillance through the use of Proctor U or Respondus.
- Dual Credit High School students will be proctored at their high school by a counselor or teacher that is not related to the student.

In circumstances where a student is unable to come to campus to complete a proctored exam, it is the student's responsibility to register and pay for exams proctored through ProctorU or Respondus. Instructions for registering will be available in the LMS for each course. Any changes to this policy must be approved by the Vice President of Instruction, Dayna Prochaska.

Persons currently enrolled in Ranger College courses may not proctor other Ranger College students.

## ***FERPA***

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

The four primary rights for students afforded under FERPA are:

- The right to review their own educational records
- The right to seek amendment of their own education records
- The right to limit disclosure of their own education records
- The right to file a complaint

Compliance with FERPA requires that student information be protected and not shared with a third party. There are additional common mistakes that instructors make though, which violate students' information privacy.

Instructors should not share the following student information without explicit permission from the student:

- E-mail addresses
- Course work
- Social media information
- E-portfolios and resumes
- Individual or group capstone projects, reports, and written assignments
- Non-directory information (photographs, date and/or place of birth, major field of study, dates of attendance at the school, grade level, degrees or honors received, all or part of the student ID or other unique personal identifier)

Express written consent for information sharing is not required if:

- Students are given prior notice of course posting requirements then post their own work
- Students are not identified and there are no grades or evaluative comments
- Posted work is available only to members of the class

### ***FERPA Guidelines***

- Before using any information outside of Canvas/Blackboard, get explicit permission from the student
- Avoid posting (or requiring) students' directory information in a course.
- You may not release non-directory or personally identifiable information about a student to a third party (parents included) without the student's written authorization or consent to release to a specific individual or organization.
- Due to FERPA regulations, refer all parent communication to either the dual credit coordinator or the Vice President of Instruction.
- Avoid emailing student-specific information (grades, assignment critiques, or other non-directory information) to an email address not issued by the College. Use the Canvas/Blackboard Grade Center and Course Messages

## ***Academic Integrity***

Please take appropriate measures at the course level but whatever those are, make sure that they are fostering a culture of academic integrity.

### ***Best practices for Promoting Academic Integrity***

- Provide an academic honesty policy within the online learning environment and discuss it early in the course, then require the students to sign it and turn it in.
- Require student engagement with the academic integrity policy. For example:
  - Ask students for their input on how to create a community of integrity at the start of the course. This establishes the students as stakeholders in the community and the process of its formation.
  - Develop and ask students to commit to a class honor code.
  - Require students to read and sign an agreement to adhere to the campus academic integrity policy.
  - Write a letter to students about integrity and post it in the course.
  - Ask students to restate the academic integrity policy (this can also be used as a writing sample to use when grading and reviewing student work).
  - Ask students to reflect on the academic integrity policy in the discussion board.
  - Include a lesson on avoiding plagiarism.
- Make assignments and activities in which appropriate sharing and collaboration is essential to successful completion.
- Foster a community of integrity by choosing authentic learning tasks that require group cohesiveness and effort. For example, focus assignments on distinctive, individual, and non-duplicative tasks or on what individual students self-identify as their personal learning needs.
- Provide students with a course or course lesson on research and/or study skills. Work with library staff to design assignments and prepare materials on plagiarism and research techniques.
- Include an ethical decision-making case study within the course.

### ***Alternative Assessments***

The use of a multi-faceted assessment strategy is a research-based best practice for promoting both academic integrity and student authentication. Frequent assessments including interactive discussions, writing assignments, quizzes, capstone projects, group work, and online exams serve to familiarize instructors with students' comprehension and writing styles thus enabling them to better authenticate the work of their online students. Options for alternative assessments include:

- Asking follow-up questions to assignments such as, "expand upon this statement you made," "tell me why you chose this phrase, description or reference," and "expand upon the ideas behind this reference"

- Selecting one or two difficult concepts from a submitted assignment and ask students to restate/rewrite the information
- Requiring students to share key learning by doing a self-reflection on an assignment in the discussion board

## ***Accessibility***

Section 508 of Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 states in part, “Electronic information and data must be equally accessible to individuals with and without disabilities.” In building online course materials it is important to bear in mind that as a public college receiving federal funding, Ranger College is required to meet Section 508 standards for Web-based information. Conforming to these standards requires that materials that could potentially pose problems for students with disabilities need to be altered to accommodate full access. DE instructors are responsible for ensuring that their courses are in compliance with this federal law.

Examples of materials that need to be altered in order to be accessible include:

- Videos that have audio need captioning and/or text transcripts
- Audio files need text transcripts
- Images must have alternate text or descriptions set for them to convey meaning
- Color alone cannot be used to communicate information
- Content that flickers or flashes should not be used
- Required applets, plug-ins, etc. should include links
- Unless specifically necessary to the course instruction, content should be posted in universal formats so it can be viewed in any browser and doesn't require opening a specific desktop application. Examples of universal format (docx, PDF, Adobe, Google Docs)
- Electronic forms and worksheets should include detailed text directions
- Students should be given advance notice of timed tests so they can contact disability services if needed

### ***Providing Extended Time for Online Quizzes and Exams***

Instructors may receive notification from Student Services that a student requires extended time on in-class and Web-based tests. The “*Moderate This Quiz*” option in Canvas allows an instructor to provide extended time for an individual or group so only one test needs to be created. Publisher websites and Blackboard have other options as well. If you are not sure how to moderate or extend the time of your exam or quiz, please contact your division chair for assistance.

## *Copyright*

Copyright is of special concern in education because faculty members continually deal with the creation and communication of ideas and information embodied in copyrighted works. As both creators and users of copyrighted materials, it is vital that faculty, students, and staff understand copyright law and the rights and responsibilities afforded them under it. This is especially true as we expand our use of technologies and digital resources, which challenge the long-standing educational exemptions and interpretations.

Copyright compliance in a course is ultimately the responsibility of the instructor delivering that course. The following information is intended to aid with compliance, but copyright questions are best addressed by library staff.

### *The Fair Use Doctrine*

Copyright law permits some "fair use" of copyrighted materials without the written permission of the owner. To fall under "fair use," a majority of the four factors of fair use should be met. If the analysis indicates that the user meets only one or two of the factors, then it is up to the user to get written permission from the owner.

#### *Guidelines for Determining Fair Use:*

- *The purpose and character of the use, including whether it is for commercial use or for nonprofit educational purposes* - In evaluating the purpose and character of the use, courts favor non-profit educational uses over commercial ones. However, there are instances in which commercial uses would qualify as fair use and other instances where educational uses would not meet the criteria.
- *The nature of the copyrighted work* - This factor focuses on the work itself. The legislative history states that there is a definite difference between reproducing a short news note and reproducing a full musical score because of the nature of the work. Moreover, some works, such as standardized tests and workbooks, will never qualify for fair use because by their nature they are meant to be consumed. Uses of factual works such as scientific articles are more likely to fall within fair use.
- *The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyright-protected work as a whole* - This factor considers how much of the copyrighted work was used in comparison to the original work as a whole. Generally, the larger the amount used, the less likely a court will find the use to be a fair use. Amount and substantiality is also a qualitative test; that is, even though one takes only a small portion of a work, it still may be too much if what is taken is the "heart of the work."
- *The effect of the use on the potential market for or value of the copyright-protected work* - Courts use this factor to determine whether the use of a work is likely to result in an economic loss that the copyright holder is otherwise entitled to receive. It looks at whether the nature of the use competes with or diminishes the potential market for the use that the owner is

already exploiting or can reasonably be expected soon to exploit. Even if the immediate loss is not substantial, courts have found that, should the loss become great if the practice were to become widespread, then this factor favors the copyright holder.

While these four factors are helpful guides, they do not clearly identify uses that are or are not fair use. Fair use is not a straightforward concept; therefore, any fair use analysis must be conducted on a case-by-case basis considering all four factors and the circumstances of the situation at hand.

Examples of fair use:

- Quotation of short passages in a scholarly or technical work for illustration or clarification of the author's observations
- Spontaneous and unexpected reproduction of the material for classroom use—for example, where an article in the morning's paper is directly relevant to that day's class topic
- A parody that includes short portions of a work
- A summary of an address or article, which may include quotations of short passages of the copyright-protected work

### *Copyright Compliance Checklist*

Material may be posted to a password-protected learning management system (LMS) such as Canvas or Blackboard WITHOUT PERMISSION only if the following conditions are met:

- The instructor owns the copyright. NOTE: Authors of academic papers are often required to transfer copyright to publishers, and therefore retain no rights in the work. In this case, permission to post a digital copy must be obtained from the publisher
- The College has a license in place that permits posting to an LMS (examples include library databases and NBC Learn)
- A publisher has provided digital supplements (ePacks, course packs, course cartridges) with a textbook and the license explicitly permits posting to an LMS, or WRITTEN permission has been obtained from the publisher
- The material has been obtained under a Creative Commons license or from Open Access sources
- Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org/>
- Open Access Journals: <http://www.doaj.org/>
- The material is in the public domain. Material enters the Public Domain 50 years from the death of the author(s) (or translator)
- Federal documents and publications are NOT eligible to be copyrighted so they may be used without written permission

### *Additional Copyright Guidelines*

- Access to audio/video recordings that are on the public Internet, such as those found on YouTube, should be provided using a link rather than by uploading a file directly to the LMS.
- Access to online resources is provided via links rather than uploading the items directly into the LMS
  - Published material that is not covered by a suitable license, not in the public domain, and not available through a Creative Commons or Open Source provider, should not be uploaded to the course
  - Copies of published worksheets or other materials intended as “consumables” by students (i.e. study guides, workbooks, etc.), or any copyrighted book or video in its entirety, should not be included in the LMS without obtaining appropriate written permission
  - After ensuring that copyrighted material can be legally used in a course, the instructor should include a citation of the original source and a copyright notice

# eLearning Platforms

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## *Instructional Delivery Platforms*

All Ranger College instructors have access to a variety of technologies to aid in the delivery of online instruction. The following policies and procedures pertain to the use and administration of these systems.

### *Learning Management System*

Canvas & Blackboard are the learning management systems used for the delivery of instruction from Ranger College. Canvas & Blackboard are Web-based platforms that provide faculty and students with features including:

- Course content for posting articles, assignments, and resources
- Calendar for posting due dates for assignments and tests
- Folders for organizing content
- Assessments for administering quizzes and exams online
- Assignments for posting assignment areas for student submissions and online grading
- Grade Center for posting grades on Canvas for students to view

### *Login Credentials*

The Canvas system's user names and passwords are drawn directly from the College's student information system (SIS), POISE. The standard format for login credentials (for students and faculty):

Username - Ranger College email address  
Initial Password - ranger1926

Students must use their Ranger College email and be logged in to their Ranger College Google Account before logging into Ranger College Canvas.

To login to Blackboard, use the following credentials for students:

Username - first initial, followed by last name, and the last four digits of your ss#  
(ex. bsmith2304)  
Initial Password - 8-digit birthdate with no dashes or spaces

To login to Blackboard, use the following credentials for faculty:

Username - first initial followed by last name  
Initial Password - same as username

All passwords are confidential information and should not be shared for any reason.

## *Course Creation and Enrollment Management*

Courses are automatically created based on information from POISE. Course creation and instructor enrollment for each semester is coordinated by the Registrar and division chairs.

- **Course Creation:** Courses are automatically created based on information from POISE. Course creation and instructor enrollment for the new semester occurs ten weeks prior to the start of that semester.
- **Student Enrollment:** Student enrollment data for Canvas/Blackboard courses are imported from POISE at the top of every hour.
- **Dropped Students:** Students may drop a course until the end of the drop period for the semester as identified by the College. After a student drops a course, the course remains on their Canvas/Blackboard courses but the student will receive a “W” for the course at the end of the semester.
- **Withdrawn Students:** Students may withdraw from all courses from the first day through the last day to withdraw as identified by the College. Students who withdraw from all courses remain in their Canvas/Blackboard courses but receive a “Q” for all courses at the end of the semester.

## *Course Management*

- **Course Merge:** For convenience, multiple sections of a single course may be merged into one course shell in Canvas/Blackboard. The instructor of record for a course can submit the merge request to the IT Help Desk allowing 3 days for completion. Faculty may also be trained to do this for their own courses.
- **Course Availability:** All courses are automatically set to the "unpublished" status when they are created. All courses should be “published” to students 24 hours prior to the beginning of the session in which they are being delivered. Instructors have the ability to select the courses they wish to display on their course lists in Canvas/Blackboard so they can have easy access to courses even if the course is unavailable.

## *Tracking and Usage*

All instructional delivery platforms used by the College have tracking capabilities and can generate usage reports to show logins and access. Information Technology and staff may check usage

statistics for any course and user at the College. Data will only be shared with authorized personnel.

Faculty members have access to the activity data for any Canvas/Blackboard course and any user enrolled in a Canvas/Blackboard course for which the faculty member has instructor permissions. Faculty members may not check activity data for users enrolled in courses for which they have no instructor permissions.

## *Quality Assurance in Courses*

### *Accessibility*

The objective of the DE accessibility requirement is to assure that the College's Web-based course materials are available to all who attempt to access them, in full compliance with the legal and ethical responsibility to do so, and consistent with the protocols of Universal Design.

Faculty members posting any instructional materials online should plan to assure accessibility. Accessibility is evaluated as part of the course review process.

### *Section 508 compliance*

Section 508, an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requires that electronic information and technology resources are accessible to people with disabilities, including employees and members of the public. This means that Ranger College faculty and staff are required to ensure that all materials students need to access for a course are made accessible. This is true with all course materials whether used in a face-to-face class or placed in an online learning environment. These materials include, but are not limited to, MS Word documents, PowerPoint Presentations, PDF documents, etc.

# Faculty Information

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## ***Policies & Procedures***

### ***Administrative Policies***

Much of the information in the Distance Education Policies and Procedures manual is intended to help guide faculty in the development and maintenance of new and existing Distance Education courses and to provide an overview of the procedures for managing Distance Education at Ranger College. This information does not supersede official College policy and procedure statements.

### ***Copyright Compliance***

It is the policy of Ranger College to abide by all applicable laws governing computer software use, privacy, copyright, and recognition of intellectual property.

All materials associated with a course are the responsibility of the designated course instructor.

### ***Intellectual Property***

The College shall own copyrighted or trademarked materials or patented inventions developed totally or partially on college time with the use of college materials or facilities or with college funding (State Board Policy 321.01).

## ***DE Course Management***

As distance education has flourished, faculty have begun to realize that one of the most daunting parts of teaching online is managing the course. The challenge is particularly serious because without efficient and effective management, keeping students motivated and actively engaged in learning is virtually impossible.

### ***Development***

Development of new Distance Education courses and the revision of existing courses is the responsibility of the faculty member(s) assigned to the courses. To ensure coordination and planning, the office of Distance Education and appropriate Division Dean must be notified at least one semester in advance of the initial offering of the developed/revised course. Prior to the initial offering of the course, the faculty member(s) must present the course materials, syllabus, and testing plans to be reviewed and approved by Distance Education Chair. There must be a Canvas or Blackboard master course created for review and may require revisions of the proposed course to receive final approval for offering.

## *Effective Engagement and Communication*

Designing for interaction and communication is a vital factor when developing a DE course. It is important to consider the methods and frequency of communication as well as the message and tone. Good communication is a key factor in student retention and success because students who feel engaged in a course are more likely to complete the course and report a positive distance education experience. Interaction may occur via telephone, email, electronic chats, on-site meetings, video teleconferencing, or other methods. Appropriate interaction for a course depends upon the course delivery mode and the technologies used by the faculty member.

### **Techniques**

Faculty are responsible for instructing students and managing their online courses with appropriate and innovative teaching techniques to engage students in active learning in order to achieve desired learning outcomes.

### *Moderating Discussions*

Asynchronous discussion forums are a mechanism for communication, collaboration and interaction in an online environment. They allow learners to have learning experiences beyond the course content by providing the learner with interactions that are vital for building 'virtual-relationships' among the learners.

By moderating course discussion forums, a DE instructor can help ensure that a respectful social community is established and maintained for a DE course. For example, instructors can moderate a synchronous chat session by specifying a specific date and time that the session will be held. The instructors can moderate and facilitate the session, guide and direct the discussion, offer feedback, pose questions, etc. An instructor can make this part of the overall participation grade a student receives for the course.

The following list includes tips and techniques for moderating discussion forums within an online course environment so that it yields greater student participation and highly engaging interactions.

- Clarify the objectives and the time frames for contributing and responding to messages in the forum
- Create engaging activities that encourage and motivate students to use the discussion forum
- Insist on the use of proper grammar and spelling when students participate in the discussion forum
- Divide large classes into smaller discussion groups
- Establish guidelines for communication that include respect and constructive feedback while making it clear that sarcasm and negativity will not be tolerated.
- Indicate what your response time will be and stick with it so that students don't feel like you are not involved
- Because moderating discussions can be quite an onerous task, teach students moderating skills as and rotate the moderator schedule
- Instead of replying to each discussion posting, reply to a prominent posting from each student

- Students whose postings do not receive much response from other users may feel discouraged. Thus, the instructor needs to identify these and provide tips to increase discussion among a thread such as asking users to reply to other users' responses to the original thread, to post specific content, to use quotes from previous postings in a response, and to use examples and references in postings

### *Engaging Students with Interactivity and Variety*

Incorporate variety into online instruction to keep interest and motivation high. Use relevant visuals or sounds to illustrate points, and if possible, bring in external references that reinforce key concepts such as a website, podcast, or YouTube presentation of an expert in a specific area. Other ideas to promote interaction are to have students do some research and find some reference information that illustrates a course concept then share that information in the course discussion area.

Provide information on an opposing viewpoint or perspective which might represent another way to think about a subject, pose questions to make students look at issues from a multitude of perspectives, or provide feedback on student or group projects. These are just a few examples of ways instructors can engage students.

### *Establish a Social Community with Student-Centered Activities*

In addition to designing interaction for students, a DE instructor must create and foster an environment, atmosphere, or context in which those interactions can take place. This type of atmosphere is one that encourages social interaction among students and provides a respectful online environment for students to feel comfortable interacting with one another and where they can feel part of a community.

For example, having students post a personal introduction to the course's discussion board can help students learn about each other and promote a sense of community. Community is also fostered when students collaborate on group projects, participate in social networking, interview one another, or interact in a cyber cafe. The instructor can incorporate this into the class by posting topics for discussions and so on and giving participation points to students who post and respond to relevant course topics.

## *Meaningful Feedback*

Providing feedback in an online environment can be challenging and time-consuming but is absolutely necessary because while students in face-to-face classes have many opportunities for informal feedback, this is not the case within an online environment.

### **Recommended Feedback Guidelines**

For feedback to be effective, it should be provided to students in a timely manner. Feedback at the beginning of the course is usually focused on simple items such as expectations and getting to know the online environment. More specific and meaningful feedback can be provided as students undertake the formative and summative assessment tasks during the course. Below is a list of tips for improving online feedback.

- Be descriptive with your feedback
- Be specific rather than general with your feedback and focus on the positives
- If negative feedback is required, don't provide it in an online environment that other students access (for example, send a course message to an individual student rather than use a discussion post)
- When giving constructive feedback that is negative, provide alternative strategies where possible. This would direct the student toward ways in which to improve their performance rather than simply telling them what they did wrong.
- Provide feedback as soon as possible so that the student the assignment is still fresh in the student's head and the feedback can be applied to the next assignment
- Be mindful of the impact of your feedback on the student
- Where possible, link the feedback to the course learning outcomes or objectives
- By providing regular informal feedback, your students should not be surprised by the results of formal assessment feedback
- Formative feedback is often more effective than summative feedback

## *Final Examinations*

Specific times for final examinations in traditional courses are published in the schedule of classes. The College Faculty Handbook indicates that each faculty member must adhere to the published examination schedule and is not permitted to change the published class examination schedule without prior written approval from the Vice President of Instruction. Because hybrid courses do have a face-to-face element, faculty teaching hybrid sections should adhere to the same final examination schedule provided for traditional courses. Because online courses do not have a face-to-face element, faculty teaching online sections do not have a specific time for their final exams but should give the exam during the final examination period published in the schedule of classes.

## *Academic Integrity and Assessment Verification*

Faculty are responsible for defining the standards to measure student success in their courses in accordance with College and department policies. Delivery of these assessments, however, must be aligned with the College's policies for being HEOA compliant. The Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA), passed into law in 2008, includes a requirement that schools take adequate measures to ensure that the student enrolled in an online class is the student doing the coursework.

Instructors of online courses from Ranger College must require that students complete proctored final exams.

### **Testing Services**

Students who would like to come to campus to take an online test can make arrangements with the Academic Testing Centers. The Academic Testing Center operating hours are 8:00 am to 3:30 p.m.. Campus Academic Testing Centers' locations and contact information is listed below.

<b>SITE</b>	<b>TESTING ROOM LOCATION</b>	<b>TESTING CONTACT</b>
Brownwood Center	Computer Lab	Alta Yeats 325-203-5011
Erath Center	Computer Lab	Connie Gonzalez 254-968-1069
Ranger Campus	Business Building	Stan Feaster 254-267-7017

### **Plagiarism-Detection Services**

*VeriCite* is a plagiarism prevention service built into Canvas. This service helps faculty prevent plagiarism by detecting unoriginal content in student papers. In addition to acting as a plagiarism deterrent, it also has features designed to aid in educating students about plagiarism and the importance of proper citation of any borrowed content.

# Student Information

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## ***DE Topics in the Student Handbook***

### ***Grievance Process***

Students who are enrolled in any course at Ranger College who might have a complaint about the course or an experience with Ranger College can follow the College's standard grievance procedure found in the Ranger College Catalog or Student Handbook.

Ranger College desires to resolve student grievances, complaints, and concerns in an expeditious, fair, and amicable manner.

### ***Student FAQs***

#### ***How do students register for Distance Education classes?***

Students register for Distance Education classes in the same way that they register for any other class. That is, students apply to the College, take any required placement tests, meet with an advisor as necessary, and register for classes using Campus Connect. For more information about the admission and registration process, visit the College's Web page.

#### ***Can students take both Distance Education classes and traditional face-to-face classes?***

Students can take any "mixture" of hybrid, online, and traditional courses.

#### ***Are Distance Education classes more difficult than traditional classes?***

Distance Education classes are the same as classes conducted in a traditional classroom in terms of objectives, readings, and assessments. The primary difference between distance and traditional courses is the way the instruction in the class is delivered. Distance Education classes offer, of course, greater flexibility for those students who work, have families and take other classes.

#### ***Can Distance Education students use Ranger College campus resources?***

All resources available to Ranger College students are available to Distance Education students.

*Are Distance Education students eligible for financial aid?*

Yes. Financial aid grants, loans, scholarships, and Veterans benefits may be used for Distance Education classes. Students should contact Student Services for more information.

*Can students transfer Distance Education classes to another institution?*

Yes. Ranger College's Distance Education courses are fully accredited, just as are its traditional courses, and so they can be transferred to another institution. For more information about transferring from Ranger College to another Texas institution, visit the TCCNS (Texas Common Course Numbering System); [Comparison | TCCNS | Welcome](#) page: [Transferring Tips](#). It is, of course, the student's responsibility to check with the institution to which he/she wants to transfer for full details.

*What courses does Ranger College offer in Distance Education format?*

The [Ranger College Website](#) may be checked for a detailed list of DE courses.

*What if a student needs assistance with a DE course?*

Students having academic trouble with a course should contact their instructor. Students experiencing technical difficulties should contact Canvas support at 1-866-517-0583 available 24/7 or the IT Helpdesk.