



TO: Executive Vice Chancellors for Academic and Health Affairs; Provosts/Chief Academic Officers, U. T. Institutions

FROM: The U. T. System Student Advisory Council Affordability and Academic Success Committee

DATE: May 18, 2021

RE: Recommendation on the Quality of Online and Hybrid Course Delivery and Instruction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions across the nation and world were forced to transition overnight to a virtual format. Online courses became the standard for all U. T. System institutions. The U. T. System Student Advisory Council Affordability and Academic Success Committee would like to highlight some inconsistencies and issues with the quality of instruction and delivery frequently raised by students across the U. T. System.

The Council acknowledges and appreciates the unprecedented efforts U. T. institutions put into developing and enhancing online and hybrid learning during the pandemic. Generally speaking, students have been pleased with their ability to continue their education seamlessly and without major setbacks. We also appreciate that the overnight expansion of online and hybrid options helped to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and saved lives. However, the emergency transition to remote learning was not without problems, and we would like to raise some concerns regarding the quality of instruction and delivery, in addition to offering some suggestions to ensure a positive educational experience for students, moving forward.

1. In accordance with the guidelines established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC), faculty are expected to maintain regular office hours. Faculty teaching distance education classes are required to hold at least one hour of office consultation for every three credit hours. Certainly, office hours are important, but in our current remote learning environment, we recommend that distance education faculty include a statement on their syllabi notifying students of a reasonable time frame (usually 24-48 hours) within which to expect a response to an emailed query.
2. Faculty should also be aware that, in accordance with federal regulations, distance education classes should provide multiple opportunities for substantive interactions between the faculty member and students in the course. These substantive interactions should involve the use of technologies that promote active engagement and learning. For example, faculty are encouraged to use discussion boards provided through the institution's learning management system. In addition, faculty are also encouraged to embrace other interactive and communications technology that the college provides, including Adobe Connect, WebEx, etc.

3. In accordance with *Quality Matters* guidelines, faculty should clearly communicate course and individual assignment grading criteria. Prior to the drop deadline, instructors should notify students of grading modifications (e.g., curve, extra credit, etc.).

We appreciate your attention to these matters and encourage you to communicate with your faculty about these requirements and expectations for online course quality. We encourage institutions to provide professional development opportunities for all faculty to learn more about how to design and deliver high-quality online classes, as well as to distribute existing rubrics and guidelines, such as the *Quality Matters'* rubric for assessing quality of online and blended courses for higher education.

Thank you for your consideration.