



**POLICY TITLE**

***Distance Education Course Attendance Policy***

**POLICY NUMBER**

***1-013***

<b>Responsible Unit:</b> <i>Office of Academic Affairs - SUBR</i>	<b>Effective Date:</b> <i>August 1, 2020</i>
<b>Responsible Official:</b> <i>Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs - SUBR</i>	<b>Last Reviewed Date:</b>
<b>Policy Classification:</b> <i>Academic Affairs - SUBR</i>	<b>Origination Date:</b> <i>July 17, 2020</i>

**I. POLICY STATEMENT AND RATIONALE**

Institutions that are required or choose to take attendance are expected to have a procedure in place to routinely monitor attendance records in distance education courses to determine when a student withdraws. Faculty members must certify that students are actively attending a distance education course. Based on guidance from the Federal Student Aid Handbook, specific criteria for measuring attendance in distance education courses must be established, along with processes for recording, and reporting attendance. If records indicate a registered student has not attended or engaged in academically related activities, a school must perform a Return of Title IV Aid calculation for students who have withdrawn or otherwise ceased attendance in a distance education course.

**II. POLICY SCOPE AND AUDIENCE**

The primary audiences for this policy are academic units, including faculty and students. This policy on attendance in distance education courses shall operate in addition to any attendance requirements imposed by institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies. Faculty will be apprised of their obligations to record attendance in distance education courses along with the criteria to be used to measure attendance. Students will be advised of the attendance obligations associated with enrollment in distance education courses, the consequences of failure to attend distance education courses, and the criteria that may be used to establish attendance.

### III. POLICY COMPLIANCE

This policy is required to comply with the federal Title IV Aid regulations. The Division of Academic Affairs, the University Registrar, deans, and faculty are primarily responsible for ensuring compliance with recording and reporting attendance as required by this policy. The Division of Finance, and the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Success are responsible for reconciling the attendance reports from the University Registrar with the obligations imposed upon the University under the Title IV Regulations.

### IV. POLICY DEFINITIONS

As used in the policy statement and except where indicated, the following definitions apply and are adopted from the definitions in the NC-SARA Manual, and the Federal Student Aid Handbook:

*Attendance:* Per the *Title IV Program Integrity Final Rules*, "academic attendance" and "attendance at an academically-related activity" in distance education courses include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physically attending a class where there is direct interaction between the instructor and students
- Submitting an academic assignment
- Taking 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

*Branch Campus:* refers to a campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary and is in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers full programs of study, not just courses.

*Distance Education:* refers to instruction offered by any means where the student and faculty member are in separate physical locations. It includes, but is not limited to, online, interactive video and correspondence courses or programs at branch campuses.

*Excessive Absences:* the number of absences beyond the allowable number based on the instructional term, instructional modality, and the applicable attendance reporting periods. The instructional terms are as indicated in the attached Implementation Guidelines.

*Hybrid Course:* refers to an educational program or a course that includes both face-to-face and distance education. It is also known by the name "blended" and, sometimes, other terms.

*Main Campus:* refers to the principal campus designated as such by the Institution's Accrediting Agency or, if the Accrediting Agency does not designate a Main Campus or designates multiple such campuses, the principal campus designated by the U.S. Department of Education through a Title IV aid agreement or, in the event that the Institution does not participate in Title IV programs, designated by the applicant Institution's Home State.

*Online Course*: refers to a course offered asynchronously, via the institutions' Learning Management System.

*Other Attendance Reporting Period*: refers to deadlines established by the University Registrar for reporting attendance that establish student's last day of attendance (LDA).

**V. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES**

See the Attachment A *Distance Education Attendance Policy Implementation Guidelines*.

**VI. POLICY RELATED INFORMATION**

For additional information on taking attendance in distance education courses, refer to <https://ifap.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/fsahandbook/1617FSAHbkActiveIndexMaster.pdf>

**VII. POLICY HISTORY AND REVIEW CYCLE**

The effective date of this policy is August 1, 2020. This origination date of this policy is July 17, 2020 and is subject to review at such times as mandated by federal law and the Southern University System five-year policy review cycle.

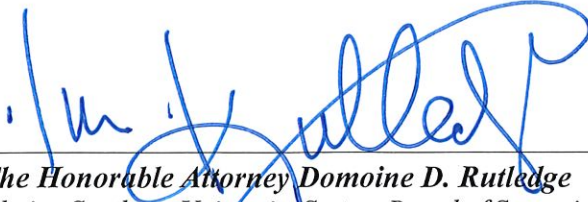
**VIII. POLICY URL**

Upon approval, the policy will be located at this URL: <http://www.sus.edu/page/su-board-policies>

**IX. POLICY APPROVAL**

  
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**Ray L. Belton, Ph.D.**  
*President-Chancellor, Southern University and A&M College System*

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*Effective Date of Policy*

  
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**The Honorable Attorney Domoine D. Rutledge**  
*Chair - Southern University System Board of Supervisors*

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*Effective Date of Policy*

# ATTACHMENT A

## Southern University and A&M College Distance Education Attendance Policy Implementation Guidelines

At Southern University and A&M College and Southern University Online, attendance in distance education courses shall be determined by course participation as measured by the designated criteria. Faculty shall incorporate meaningful and engaging learning activities from the criteria below, which provide multiple opportunities for assessing attendance during the required reporting period. Failure to observe this policy may jeopardize a student's academic standing and eligibility for financial aid. These guidelines apply to graduate and undergraduate courses.

### Applicable Definitions

The following definitions apply to these distance education attendance guidelines.

*Branch Campus:* refers to a campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary and is in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers full programs of study, not just courses.

*Distance Education:* refers to instruction offered by any means where the student and faculty member are in separate physical locations. It includes, but is not limited to, online, interactive video and correspondence courses or programs at branch campuses.

*Excessive Absences:* the number of absences beyond the allowable number based on the instructional term, instructional modality, and the applicable attendance reporting periods. The instructional terms are as indicated below:

- *Eight-week Term:* The **Census Reporting Period** ends 7 days from the first day of class in Southern University Online, and the SUBR Summer Semester.
  - Excessive absence during the Census Period of an 8-week class is more than 2 missed assignments in the first seven days following the first day of class
- *Sixteen-week Term:* The **Census Reporting Period** ends 14 days from the first day of class in 16-week hybrid or 16-week online courses.
  - *Hybrid Courses:*
    - Students enrolled in hybrid courses shall meet separate attendance requirements for the lecture, and the online instruction components.
    - Excessive absence in the 16-week Hybrid classes is:
      - More than 2 class lectures in first two weeks of class
      - More than 2 missed attendance assignments in online/asynchronous coursework
  - *Online 16-Week Class*
    - Excessive absence during the Census Period is more than 4 missed assignments in the first two weeks of class

*Hybrid Course:* refers to an educational program or course that includes both face-to-face and distance education. It is also known by the name “blended” and, sometimes, other terms.

*Main Campus:* refers to the principal campus designated as such by the Institution’s Accrediting Agency or, if the Accrediting Agency does not designate a Main Campus or designates multiple such campuses, the principal campus designated by the U.S. Department of Education through a Title IV aid agreement or, in the event that the Institution does not participate in Title IV programs, designated by the applicant Institution’s Home State.

*Online Course:* refers to a course offered asynchronously, via the institutions’ Learning Management System.

*Other Attendance Reporting Period:* refers to deadlines established by the University Registrar for reporting attendance that establish student’s last day of attendance (LDA).

### **Criteria for Certifying Attendance in Distance Education Courses**

Students must attend class or attend academically related activities. Faculty shall conspicuously include the attendance requirements in the course syllabus. The attendance requirements for eight-week, sixteen-week, or summer school shall vary. The criteria to be used by faculty to measure students’ attendance include, but are not limited to the following:

- Physically attending a class where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students
- Submitting an academic assignment
- Taking 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

"Academic attendance" and "attendance at an academically-related activity" **do not** include activities where a student may be present, but not academically engaged, such as:

- Living in institutional housing
- Participating in the institution's meal plan
- Logging into an online class without active participation
- Participating in academic counseling or advisement

### **Resolving Distance Education Attendance Disputes**

A student's self-certification that is not supported by documentation is unacceptable to establish attendance or the last date of attendance (LDA). All Attendance is established by faculty attendance records as outlined above and maintained within the Learning Management System (Moodle).

### **Last Date of Attendance Reporting Periods**

The LDA documentation is required by the U.S. Department of Education to determine if a student who receives financial aid and fails to earn a passing grade in a course has actually attended and/or completed the course, or if they withdrew from a course without providing the university official notification. It is also used to determine the type and amount of financial aid eligible to be retained by a student who officially withdrew based on the time of the withdrawal.

In distance education courses, for purposes of LDA, faculty shall use the criteria set forth above to measure attendance. The Registrar will publish the attendance reporting dates on the University Academic Calendars. The process for reporting attendance shall be in accordance with the procedures established by the University Registrar.

### **Unavoidable Absences from Distance Education Classes**

*Absence Due to Unavoidable Circumstance:* A student required to be absent from class during the reporting period because of illness, deployment, natural disaster, first response duty or other unavoidable circumstances, should promptly report the reasons to the instructor and, if required, present excuses. The instructor should make clear to the student that excuses explain absences, but do not remove them. At the instructors' discretion, the student may be allowed to remove the "absence" by submitting assigned attendance work.

*Absence Due to Required Attendance at a University Sponsored Event:* Excuses for participation in University sponsored activities will be initiated by the sponsoring unit and approved by the College Dean and the Office of Academic Affairs.

### **Referrals for Excessive Unexcused Absences**

After the mandatory attendance reporting period, to the extent practicable, faculty should intervene with students at risk of failure due to non-attendance and may provide remedial measures that include referrals for appropriate student and academic support services.

**Approved:**

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Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for  
Academic Affairs

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Date

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Executive Vice-Chancellor

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Date