Inter American University of Puerto Rico
Office of the President

**INSTITUTIONAL NORMS FOR
ENSURING THE QUALITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

NORMATIVE DOCUMENT A-0322-070

1. INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to establish the bases that ensure the excellence of distance education through the application and development of the quality standards defined here. The development, consolidation, and general acceptance of distance education, in its different modalities, requires that rigorous quality is ensured.

Quality is understood, in a broad sense, as the achievement of the objectives established by the institution, the appropriate student achievement and learning, the satisfaction of the university community, and the ability to adapt and continuous transformation of the University to the demands of society, all with the greatest efficiency. It also refers to the characteristics that relate to its ability to meet the declared or implicit needs through its services, the design of courses and programs, and the academic offer, among other aspects. In addition to using authentic, adequate, and effective assessment techniques, the certainty of the student's authorship in the works and evaluation tests and the creation of learning communities must be the objectives of distance education of excellence.

II. Purpose

The objective of these standards is, on the one side, to define precisely the quality requirements of first-class university education, but also to help all units of the system, academic departments, professors, students, technicians, and administrators to achieve University academic excellence.

III. Legal basis

These Institutional Standards for Ensuring the Quality of Distance Education are promulgated under the authority vested in the President by the Board of Trustees in its Bylaws.

IV. Scope

The norms apply to all Inter-American University of Puerto Rico's academic units.

V.   Structure

The Inter-American University of Puerto Rico (UIPR) defines its Institutional Standards to Ensure the Quality of Distance Education following the general indications of the Institutional Policy for the Implementation of Online Learning A-AD-005-98 (1998), the Verification of Compliance with Accreditation - Relevant Federal Regulations and the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). In addition, it frames its practices in the quality standards outlined by various internationally recognized organizations. These rules are organized into the following general chapters:

1.   Commitment and institutional context
2.   Curriculum and instruction
3.   Support for teachers
4.   Student Support
5.   The integrity of distance education
6.   Evaluation and Appraisal

When incorporated within the mission of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, these quality standards must be considered integrated into the university regulations in coherence with the precepts and quality criteria of the IAUPR and, therefore, must be interpreted and applied considering the university regulations. The same general principles govern distance education as university education in all its degrees and academic levels.

1.   Commitment and institutional context

Distance education is part of the mission of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, in coherence with its educational project. The mission of each academic unit is congruent with this institutional commitment. Due to its characteristics, distance education entails demands ranging from a constant renewal of technological infrastructure to teachers' continuous training. In any case, the core issue is learning and ongoing transformation. Distance education is a strategic component of the IAUPR and is part of the governance system of the institution at its different levels. Before offering courses and academic programs at a distance, the University takes measures and contingencies in the formal, personal, administrative, and technological order that underpins the highest quality of educational management.

1.1 Distance education course design and academic programs are in harmony and coherence with the mission articulated by the IAUPR and the academic offer approved for each unit of the university system.

1.2 As a guarantee of their formal quality, the academic programs offered by the IAUPR under distance education modalities are duly authorized and accredited by government agencies, agencies, and competent entities, as the case may be.

1.3 Each academic unit has a plan for managing distance education, in which the priorities for the application and development of the courses, programs, and services that compose it are established. The distance courses, programs, and services offered by each academic unit are adapted to this plan

1.4 The distance education plan of each academic unit is based on the   following fundamental pillars:

    1.4.1   A computer and telecommunications (IT) plan ensure distance education's support and continuity. This plan includes providing infrastructure and technological support (physical spaces and facilities, means and technical assistance, maintenance, and Internet access) following the remote offer of each academic unit.

    1.4.2   An established technological system ("hardware" and "software") guarantees the continuity of academic management, effective communication between the actors of the plan, and the relationships necessary to achieve academic goals and demands.

    1.4.3   The administrative and financial resources are necessary to offer quality distance courses, programs, and services, per the requirements of government agencies, agencies, and competent entities.

    1.4.4   The support staff at the service of all the actors of the plan (students, teachers, and administrative staff).

1.5 The IAUPR has *Guidelines and Standards for the Preparation of Contingency Plans for Emergencies due to Natural or Other Disasters* (normative document G-0222-052), to face adverse situations such as natural disasters and pandemics, among others, that could affect the continuity of distance education.

1.6 The IAUPR guarantees the privacy and confidentiality of the personal information of all participants in the distance education processes and ensures that:

    1.6.1   Personal information is appropriately stored and protected.

    1.6.2   The protocols required to access data are in place.

      1.6.3 The technologies and processes adopted in distance education do not put the security of data and information at risk.

1.7 The IAUPR has an institutional policy related to international exchanges of duly accredited courses and programs and services at various levels for distance education.

1.8 In each academic unit and the Central Office of the System, distance education has an administrative structure and a budget that correspond to their needs, providing direction to the project and facilitating its operation.

.

    1.8.1 The Central Office of the University System:

      1.8.1.1 Collaborates in creating, implementing, and developing the academic offer at a distance and promotes the efficient use of resources in the various academic units and the process of authorization and accreditation of distance programs before the competent agencies.

      1.8.1.2 It includes the academic offer at a distance in the University's marketing, promotion and recruitment campaigns.

      1.8.1.3 Promotes and monitors compliance with established quality standards, as well as compliance with state and federal regulations applicable to distance education.

      1.8.1.4 Promotes the appropriate means and the development of the competencies of the professors who offer distance courses in each academic unit.

      1.8.1.5 It articulates the offer of distance courses, and the agreements or consortia related to its offerings, within the internationalization projects of the system.

      1.8.1.6 Advises academic units on adopting new technologies and instructional strategies applicable to distance education.

      1.8.1.7 It promotes the creation of appropriate procedures and standards for providing distance courses and programs.

      1.8.1.8 It provides academic units with the necessary infrastructure to implement distance education.

      1.8.1.9 Facilitates students' access to systemic educational resources.

      1.8.1.10 Supports collaboration forms related to distance education between the different components of the institution.

1.8.2 The academic units of the university system:

    1.8.2.1   Create programs under distance education modalities to provide students with a valuable learning experience.

    1.8.2.2   Program their academic offer at a distance.

    1.8.2.3   Promote the recruitment of students at a distance, following the established requirements.

    1.8.2.4   Select and train teachers to design and teach distance courses following the requirements and procedures established in the current Faculty Manuals.

    1.8.2.5   Train technical staff.

    1.8.2.6   They ensure students access to their systemic educational resources.

    1.8.2.7   They provide and facilitate support services for distance learners, equivalent to those offered to students of other modalities.

    1.8.2.8   They carry out the commitments derived from consortia or agreements with other institutions or organizations related to distance education.

    1.8.2.9   Provide technical support in the various technologies applicable to distance education.

    1.8.2.10   They adopt and apply quality norms, procedures, and standards to the design and deliver of distance courses and programs.

    1.8.2.11   Ensure compliance with distance education's institutional, state, and federal regulations.

2. Curriculum and instruction

The IAUPR conceives distance education as a modality that is part of the general educational policy of the university system. In this sense, the pedagogical interaction between teachers and students is central to the institution, the quality and integrity of instruction, and the accessibility and relevance of distance courses and programs.

2.1 The approval of a distance course or program follows institutional regulations. In particular, courses or programs:

    2.1.1   Respect the description, credits, and pedagogical structure of distance education.

    2.1.2   Have the content of the corresponding syllabus adapted to the didactic requirements of distance education so that students

can identify the unity between the syllabus and the course content.

2.1.3 They are approved based on *the Procedure for Creation and Review of Distance Courses.*

2.1.4 In the case of the distance academic offer of Technical Careers and Continuing Education programs, they will follow these guidelines and any others established for both levels.

2.2 The academic authorities of each unit and the university system accredit compliance with these criteria similarly to how it is performed with courses and programs in the face-to-face modality.

2.2.1 The Central Office of the University System:

2.2.1.1 Establish the requirements, characteristics, and functions performed by the facilitators and managers of distance education in and out of the academic units.

2.2.1.2 Establish the calendar and academic terms for teaching distance courses.
Establishes the criteria, procedures, and documents for creating and reviewing distance courses. In addition, it ensures compliance with them.

2.2.2 Academic units of the University System:

2.2.2.1 Ensure that the courses approved to be offered at a distance meet the criteria established by the Institution in the *Evaluation Document for the Creation and Review of Distance Courses*. These courses are evaluated and reviewed by instructional design experts and peers who master the content, following the *Procedure for the Creation and Review of Distance Courses*.

2.2.2.2 Ensure that professors who design or offer distance courses meet the criteria of academic eligibility as established in the current Faculty Handbook, including possessing the applicable competencies for this modality, being certified by the Institution to design or offer courses in this modality, and receiving continuous training in related areas.

2.2.2.3 They ensure that professors offering distance courses meet institutional requirements regarding communication, regular substantive interaction, instruction, and feedback.

2.2.3   Teachers of distance courses:

2.2.3.1 Notify at the beginning of the course the resources available to the students so that the necessary interaction can occur. Similarly, they report on the resources and materials required and optional.

2.2.3.2 Demonstrate communication and interaction with students through various means, as described in paragraph 2.8.

2.2.3.3   Respond to the communications of the students of The distance course in a period not exceeding 48 hours or two working days.

2.2.3.4   Provide substantive feedback on the work submitted by the students of the distance course within a period not exceeding two weeks from the the expiration date of the activity.

2.2.3.5   Interact regularly and substantively with the course students, following the requirements of the government, agencies, and competent entities.

2.2.3.6   Offer at least one custodial assessment or one activity to validate the student's identity, in accordance with the requirements of the government agencies, agencies, and competent entities.

2.2.3.7   Promote academic rigor through their instructional strategies and assessment activities.

2.2.4 Students enrolled in distance courses:

2.2.4.1   Undertake the current General Student Regulations dispositions related to academic integrity as a contractual commitment and strict compliance with other aspects of academic management.

2.2.4.2   When enrolling in a program or distance learning course, they assume ethical responsibility during assessments, including proctored evaluations.

2.2.4.3   When enrolling in a program or a distance course, they assume a commitment to comply with the institution's authentication and identity verification processes.

2.2.4.4   By enrolling in a program or a distance course, they assume a commitment to comply with the minimum technological resources and skills required for the modality.

2.3   The instructional design of distance courses ensures that the required and supporting educational materials and resources are adequate and up-to-date, following the theories and practices of the disciplines. This design should facilitate the significant processing of information and learning, promoting the autonomy and independence of the student and enabling effectiveness in the use of the resources offered by technology.

2.4   The instructional design model implemented for distance learning courses must meet the following stages:

     2.4.1   Know students' characteristics, needs, and preferences as active participants in teaching.
     2.4.2   Establish learning objectives to determine what teaching outcomes students should achieve by taking the course.
     2.4.3   Select methods, technologies, and materials for design and implementation.
     2.4.4   Promote regular substantive student participation and interaction through active and collaborative strategies.
     2.4.5   Establish mechanisms for the continuous improvement of instructional design and instruction.

2.5   The instructional design of the distance courses responds to the institutional strategy for the internationalization of the curriculum, which implies that students are exposed to international perspectives and the development of global competencies through resources, academic activities, and evaluation activities, among others.

2.6   Distance learning courses have educational resources through means compatible with distance learning, including the Access to Information Centers (CAI) system, which has a variety of databases to support the courses. If necessary, the teacher provides suitable alternative sources.

2.7   The design of distance courses must comply with the minimum accessibility requirements, as stipulated in the *Evaluation Document for the Creation and Review of Distance Courses*, for compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

2.8   The IAUPR considers the existence of the due interaction between the various actors of distance learning as a determining and essential factor of educational quality.

     2.8.1   For communication between teachers and students or between students, the medium will be the email system of the educational platform.
     2.8.2   For the interaction between the teacher and students or between students, the means will be virtual conferences, discussion forums, and work in virtual teams.

2.8.3 For students and content interaction, it is recommended instructional modules that integrate original content in diverse formats; video, audio, image, files, and interactive presentations in which the topics of the course are deepened using explanations, displays, examples, and definitions of terms, readings, communities of practice, simulations, and tools.

2.9 The interaction and the means used for this are subject to systematic review and evaluation to be inclusive and relevant to the requirements of each modality where the instruction is carried out. Through this, an assessment of achievements and the purification of difficulties is obtained to achieve maximum educational interaction.

2.10 The University, before enrollment, publishes the requirements, fees, and additional charges, to ensure the participation of the student in some exercise, laboratory, evaluation, or in identity verification procedures. In addition, it publishes the minimum technologies and technological skills required for distance courses. Finally, it discloses the information required by government agencies, agencies, and competent entities.

3. Teachers Support

In the educational philosophy of the IAUPR, the teaching staff plays a fundamental role. Therefore, the institution is committed to offering teachers adequate pedagogical and technological training for distance education. The IAUPR establishes rules and criteria for due attention to the student and gives teachers the contractual guarantees of their work to teach distance courses.

3.1 The institution establishes plans and procedures to train teachers who design and offer distance courses.

3.2 Through the Institute for Quality in Online Education (ICeL) and the academic units of the system, the institution offers training to teachers who design and offer distance courses. This management is part of a shared responsibility with the current Faculty Manual to avoid duplication of efforts and to promote the maximization of resources. The training will be in the following areas:

3.2.1 Instructional design of distance courses
3.2.2 Teaching strategies for distance courses
3.2.3 Evaluation and assessment in distance courses
3.2.4 Strategies for diversity, inclusion, and internationalization
3.2.5 The integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that support distance education
3.2.6 Legal, ethical, and compliance issues applicable to the design and instruction of distance learning courses

3.2.7   Issues related to academic literacy, research, and academic integrity

3.2.8   Academic management of distance courses

3.3 The institution provides teachers with the necessary human, technological, and technical resources to support the design and teaching of distance courses. The administrative systems are adequate so that the courses can be accessed from the beginning of the term.

3.4 The institution has particular procedures to compensate for the design, review, and offer of distance courses.

3.5 The institution provides the mechanisms within the "Systemic Plan of Curricular Reviews" for reviewing programs and distance courses.

4.   **Student Support**

UIPR is committed to offering academic, administrative, and student services to address the specific characteristics of distance learners.

4.1 The institution informs the student requesting information about the academic offer at a distance or who is applying for admission to one of its distance programs, the nature of the distance studies, the minimum technology and technological skills required, the support services available, and the additional costs, if any, as well as other matters stipulated by Institutional, state, and federal. regulations

4.2   The administrative systems are adequate so that students can access the courses at a distance from the beginning of the term.

4.3   The institution provides tutorials, manuals, and other support materials that facilitate the success of students enrolled in distance courses, including training on using and managing educational platforms.

4.4   The institution offers accessible and permanent support services to distance learners.

4.5   The institution has a procedure for processing students' complaints at a distance, guaranteeing due privacy and attention.

4.6   The institution encourages the student to contact their teacher if they need assistance and that the teacher attends to the request through referrals to the appropriate resources.

5.   **The integrity of distance education**

Concerning the evaluation of learning processes and the achievements and student performance, the academic units of the IAUPR are circumscribed to the following criteria:

5.1   The institution has effective procedures and tools to ensure that the student who enrolls in a distance course is the same one who

participates and completes the course and who receives the academic credit in compliance with the applicable regulations.

5.2 The institution has procedures or means to promote academic integrity and honesty in distance courses.

5.3 The institution establishes the rules and procedures for administering evaluations proctored by authorized personnel or means and the service provider's guidelines. These assessment activities guarantee student authentication, integrity in the educational process, and academic rigor.

5.4 Distance courses include, at a minimum, one proctored activity or assessment. Academic units will decide what kind of activities or assessments will undergo the custody procedure as one of the means of validating a student's identity online.

5.5 Academic integrity issues are included in the orientation to distance learners through the *Guide to Starting the Course*.

6. Evaluation and Assessment

The IAUPR evaluates the effectiveness of its academic offer and services for distance education, including the achievement of learning goals, and uses the results for its institutional improvement. The institution promotes using various evaluation and "assessment" methods following a personalized, participatory didactic model and permanent interaction between teachers and students. These methods are oriented to the learning and performance of competencies by students and not exclusively to measure the amount of knowledge acquired quantitatively.

6.1 The institution has rules and procedures for developing and reviewing distance courses and programs that ensure their quality is comparable to that of courses and programs in other study modalities. In addition, they ensure that they respond to the social needs and requirements of the current world of work within a local and international context.

6.2 The institution collects statistical data and reliable information on students' performances, both in courses and programs, and uses the results for their improvement.

6.3 The institution has processes to obtain information on the viability, effectiveness, and satisfaction of the actors of the programs and uses the findings to improve these.

6.4 The institution continuously evaluates the competencies and exercises of the professors who teach distance courses and uses the findings to improve these.

6.5 The institution encourages students to provide feedback on their distance learning experience and the instructional design of courses.

VII. Severability clause

If any part or section of these guides is declared void by a competent authority, such a decision shall not affect the remaining ones.

VIII. Amendments and repeal

This guide repeals Normative Document A-0914-050 *Guide to Distance Learning Quality Standards*. This guide may be amended or abolished by the President of the University.

IX. Validity

The provisions of these guidelines shall be effective immediately upon their approval.

VIII. Approval

_____   _____
Manuel J. Fernós   Fecha (D-M-A)
Presidente

Appendices