I. STATEWIDE STANDARD

POLICY: It is the policy of Texas State Technical College (TSTC) that the College provide distance education that is consistent in instructional quality and in accordance with the mission of the College and its strategic plan.

II. PERTINENT INFORMATION

Distance education takes place when an instructor and student are separated by physical distance and/or time. TSTC is committed to providing quality distance education through Internet-based delivery (online, hybrid, and blended courses), interactive videoconferencing (ITV), and other methods of synchronous and asynchronous instruction. The provisions of
the SOS apply to TSTC students enrolled in distance education courses, including dual enrollment students.

TSTC shall remain in compliance with the:

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement;
- SACSCOC Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs;
- and
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Principles of Good Practice for Academic Degree and Certificate Programs and Credit Courses Offered Electronically.

Distance education courses and programs shall be provided by TSTC in accordance with the Texas Education Code, Chapter 135, which defines the College’s mission as one that “shall contribute to the educational and economic development of the State of Texas by offering occupationally oriented programs with supporting academic coursework, emphasizing highly specialized advanced and emerging technical and vocational areas for certificates or associate degrees.”

**III. GENERAL GUIDELINES**

This Statewide Operating Standard (SOS) shall specify the general criteria for distance education curriculum and instruction, faculty expectations, and student expectations.

**IV. DEFINITIONS**

**Blended-Instruction Course:** A course consisting of a combination of online and face-to-face instructional time. While a significant percentage of a blended-instruction course may take place online, it does not exceed 49 percent of instructional time and, therefore, is not classified as a hybrid course. Faculty shall clearly state the required face-to-face and online time required of students in the course syllabus.

**Course Developer:** Person(s) responsible for the creation of course materials for delivery in an electronic format, including lectures, examinations, syllabi, and other course activities.

**Distance Education Course:** Any course which contains instructional time where the student and faculty member are not in the same place. This encompasses instructional television, blended-instruction, hybrid, and online courses.

**Hybrid Course:** A course in which the majority of planned instruction (between 50 and 84 percent) takes place online. Faculty shall clearly state the required face-to-face and online time required of students in the course syllabus.

**Hybrid Program:** A program in which the majority of the program’s courses are offered online. This type of program requires students to be located near a campus offering the program so that students can complete the program’s face-to-face coursework.

**Instructional Designer:** A staff member who supports faculty in the creation of distance
education courses. Instructional designers help to ensure optimal learning experiences for students in distance education courses.

**Instructional Television (ITV):** A method of distance education in which the lecture of an instructor at a given location is broadcast to students at another location.

**Instructor:** Person identified as the instructor of record who delivers a face-to-face, web-enhanced, blended-instruction, hybrid, or online course.

**Intellectual Property:** Any product of human intellect that is unique and unobvious with some value in the marketplace. Intellectual Property may be protected through patents, trademarks, or copyrights as defined in SOS ES 1.01, Intellectual Property.

**Learning Management System (LMS):** A web-based technology used for the creation, storage, and delivery of course content. It allows for monitoring of student participation and performance. Interactive features allow for student:student and faculty:student interaction.

**Major Course Revision:** Revision of an existing online or hybrid course in which at least 75 percent of the course is substantially revised. Revisions may include content and technology for delivery of content (e.g., video lectures, audio podcasts, etc.).

**LMS Governance Team:** TSTC faculty and staff representatives charged with providing input on LMS usage, maintenance, functionality, and features. The team governs appropriate LMS usage and administration for all users.

**Online Course:** A course in which 85 percent or more of planned instruction takes place online.

**Online Preparation Courses:** Training courses designed to provide faculty with requisite skills to develop and deliver online courses. These encompass the Basics of Teaching Online and the Basics of Developing Online.

**Online Program:** A program in which all of the courses in a program are offered online. This type of program does not require students to be located near a campus offering the program. The only requirements students may have for face-to-face attendance are for proctored exams and clinical evaluations.

**Online Learning Advisory Committee (OLAC):** A standing committee composed of faculty and staff who are involved in the creation and delivery of distance education courses. The committee’s charge is to provide oversight to the College’s online and hybrid course offerings.

**Quality Control Rubric:** An internal rubric used to evaluate an online course. It is based on the Open SUNY Course Quality Review (OSCQR) rubric. It serves to ensure well-designed, learner-centered, online course development and is specifically targeted for the review of online course design.
**Student Online Learning Orientation (SOLO):** A non-credit based orientation required for students who have never taken or passed (with a grade of “C” or better) a TSTC online course. It is designed to increase student awareness, readiness, and self-confidence in taking online learning courses.

**Web-Enhanced Course:** A course in which all instruction takes place face-to-face but is supported by course materials and/or activities located on the learning management system (LMS). Unlike a hybrid or a blended-instruction course, online instructional time does not replace face-to-face instructional time in a web-enhanced course.

**V. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY**

The Chancellor, or his/her designee, has the authority and responsibility to establish procedures to meet the requirements of this SOS.

**VI. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

1. Instructors who have not previously developed or taught online successfully complete training for new online instructors.

2. Distance education courses are subject to the same policies and procedures as other TSTC courses and are in compliance with best practices for distance education.

3. The process for online course development and approval is followed as stipulated by this SOS.

4. Other processes and procedures dealing with online and distance education as stipulated by this SOS are followed in regards to courses, faculty, and students.
APPENDIX

VII. RELATED STATEWIDE STANDARDS. LEGAL CITATIONS, OR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- SACSCOC Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement
- SACSCOC Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs
- THECB Distance Education Policies, Procedures, and Forms
- Texas Education Code, Chapter 135
- ES 1.01 Intellectual Property
- ES 1.11 Faculty Credentials
- ES 3.23 Student Rights and Responsibilities
- ES 4.27 Academic Integrity
- TSTC Catalog & Student Handbook
- Online Learning Course Development Proposal
- Quality Control Rubric

VIII. OPERATING REQUIREMENTS:

1. The Office of Online Learning shall be the unit responsible for ensuring administrative compliance with accreditation and institutional requirements, for acting as a liaison between the various groups involved with providing distance education for TSTC students, and for verifying appropriate technical expertise.

2. Representatives from the Offices of Online Learning and Professional Development shall support faculty in the development and delivery of distance education courses, provide ongoing training, and ensure LMS support by serving as representatives on the LMS Governance Team.

3. Online learning leadership shall be responsible for evaluating and revising distance education procedures.

4. While faculty training and support is provided, the faculty shall have primary responsibility for the quality, rigor, and integrity of their distance education content and delivery. Student learning leadership shall be responsible for ensuring the quality of distance education courses within their respective divisions in coordination with the online learning leadership.

5. Distance education courses shall be subject to the same policies and procedures as other TSTC courses in regard to syllabi, textbooks, grading, methods of evaluation, and presence and assessment of appropriate learning outcomes. Online courses shall be in compliance with best practices and therefore, shall be subjected to the course review process utilizing a Quality Control Rubric.

6. Online learning leadership shall oversee distance education activities at TSTC and shall work with Student Learning faculty and leadership to ensure the development and
delivery of quality courses. The OLAC shall be tasked with reviewing, approving, and making recommendations for course offerings to ensure compliance with SACSCOC and THECB best practices.

7. Faculty assigned to deliver an online course that has already been developed shall be required to deliver the OLAC approved course. The Office of Online Learning shall provide a copy of the approved course content to the faculty member. No changes shall be made that cause the course to deviate from an acceptable rating on any elements of the Quality Control Rubric.

8. The process for online course development and approval is initiated through the Online Learning Course Development Proposal. The process then follows the Online Course Development and Approval Workflow.

9. The College’s SOS ES 1.01 Intellectual Property defines ownership of instructional material. All materials created and used by faculty for instructional use shall adhere to copyright law of the United States and applicable TSTC SOS documents. Faculty shall be responsible for ensuring that all instructional materials and delivery methods in their courses are in compliance with copyright laws and the College’s copyright policy.

10. Policies regarding proctored examinations shall meet state and federal requirements, as well as those of accrediting agencies. Instructors may require students to take proctored examinations for online, hybrid, and blended-instruction courses. Test proctoring is available at some TSTC locations. Use of alternative proctoring sites may be necessary for students in areas where TSTC proctored testing centers are not available. Students shall be responsible for scheduling their proctored examinations and must show identification in order to take an exam. Specific information for testing and requirements shall be detailed in the course syllabi.

11. Faculty credentialing requirements shall be the same for all TSTC courses, as specified in the College’s SOS ES 1.11 Faculty Credentials. The goal of instruction shall remain the same for all methods of content delivery; therefore, faculty qualifications shall remain the same for all TSTC faculty.

12. TSTC shall provide adequate support for faculty in the development and delivery of distance education courses. Specifically, support shall be provided by instructional designers throughout the course development process and by instructional designers and instructional technology staff during course delivery. Instructors who have not previously developed or taught online must successfully complete training for new online instructors. Additionally, faculty who teach online and/or hybrid courses shall be encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities on technical and pedagogical strategies.

13. The supervision and evaluation of faculty teaching online courses shall be the same as that of faculty teaching face-to-face courses.

14. Faculty members who are approved to develop a fully online or a hybrid course may be
provided a mentor to guide and assist them during the course development process. Mentors shall be from the same campus location and the same department, if possible.

15. Unless otherwise agreed to, the development of any type of distance education course shall be part of the faculty workload, and faculty compensation for course delivery shall be the same as for the counterpart face-to-face course.

16. The load value for any type of distance education course shall be the same as for its counterpart face-to-face course. Faculty teaching distance education courses shall conduct the same expected number of office hours as faculty teaching face-to-face courses; however, office hours may be conducted online. Faculty may schedule and conduct these hours at times that best meet the needs of their students. Online hours must be provided to students and posted just as those for face-to-face courses.

17. Regular and substantial communication between faculty and students shall be a requirement of all courses (including all distance education courses). Courses that only contain student-initiated interaction do not meet this requirement; therefore, a required element of all distance education courses shall be the presence of faculty-initiated interaction.

18. Maximum student enrollment in an online course shall be set by the appropriate Division Director and Department Chair in conjunction with the instructor. Consideration shall be given to the content and level of student-faculty interaction in the course, as well as to best practices, when determining online course size.

19. Students enrolled in distance education courses shall be subject to the academic standards detailed in applicable TSTC SOS documents to include, but not limited to, ES 3.23 Student Rights and Responsibilities and ES 4.27 Academic Integrity. Students enrolled in distance education courses are subject to the Code of Student Conduct and other requirements outlined in the TSTC Catalog & Student Handbook.

20. Regardless of class format, students shall have adequate access to and can effectively use appropriate services to support their learning. Services shall include, but are not limited to, Learning Resource Centers, bookstores, registration, testing, tutoring, advisement, support services, and financial aid. Distance education students are provided these services via a variety of delivery methods including but not limited to, links on web and/or portal pages, links on the College website, email, links embedded within courses, and the telephone.

21. TSTC shall administer all of the College’s policies and practices in accordance with federal and state laws without discrimination against any qualified individual with a disability. Students who need assistance should contact the Office of Student Support Services.

22. For the purpose of verifying a distance education student’s attendance in the course, the student shall be considered a participant in the course through submission of an assignment, submission of an assessment, or contribution to discussion.
23. TSTC and distance education faculty shall ensure that the student who registers for a course or program is the same student who completes the course or program through the use of:
   a. A secure login and password for all classes; and
   b. The optional use of proctored examinations.

24. Students taking online learning courses shall be subject to the same admissions policies, admissions testing procedures, and course prerequisites as traditional students. Students wishing to take an online course at TSTC who have not previously done so or who have not passed a TSTC online course with a grade of “C” or better must concurrently enroll in the SOLO when enrolling in their TSTC online course. The SOLO must be successfully completed prior to the first class day of the online course unless otherwise approved by online learning leadership.

25. Any additional tuition and fees required for distance education courses or programs shall be published and available to students at time of registration.

26. The relevant instructional department shall be responsible for developing an ongoing process to assess student success, retention, instruction, course quality, and faculty and student satisfaction. TSTC shall include distance education courses when collecting data for assessing student learning outcomes. Students in distance education courses shall have access to and complete End-of-Course Surveys.