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I. POLICY STATEMENT

Austin Career Institute (hereinafter referred to as "*ACI*") is committed to providing quality courses regardless of the delivery format. As such, this policy focuses specifically on the best practices and strategies for online/distance learning and course delivery. Within this context, *ACI* further endorses the following high quality standards/guidelines for course design, instruction, associated support services, evaluation and assessment, use and distribution of course materials, the rights and responsibilities of parties and all related matters associated with online/distance learning.

This policy is additionally designed to assist *ACI* in the fulfillment of its educational mission and role in accordance with all applicable laws, rules and regulations promulgated by Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and Counsel on Occupational Education (COE).

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Online/distance Education

Online/distance education is defined as a delivery of educational courses and programs which uses a wide range of educational and telecommunication technologies including satellite and web-based technologies which incorporates learning management systems with synchronous and/or asynchronous modes of communication. This mode of delivery requires special techniques of online/distance course design and grounded instructional techniques to enhance online/distance students learning outcomes (OSLO), as well as special organization and administrative arrangements.

B. Fully Delivered Online Course (FDOC)

ACI does not offer any programs or courses with this delivery method.

FDOC means a course in which **80 to100%** of the instruction is entirely delivered online, with the following two (2) variances:

- Students and instructors meet exclusively only and the course is delivered entirely online. The entire curriculum is delivered and course orientation as well as evaluation and performance testing are all conducted online using course management software with asynchronous and synchronous tools of communication.

- Students and instructors only meet on-campus for orientation and/or evaluation and performance testing. All other class activities will be performed online using course management software with synchronous and asynchronous tools of communication. In this case, the online student spends

5-20% of learning time on campus engaged in face-to-face interactions with instructor.

C. Hybrid Course Delivery (HCD) or Blended Course Delivery (BCD)

Hybrid Course Delivery or HCD refers to a course in which **20 to 49%** of the instruction is entirely delivered online (distance education). Hybrid courses blend face-to-face interaction such as in-class discussions, active group work, and live lectures with typically web- based educational technologies such as online course cartridges, assignments, discussion boards, and other web-assisted learning tools to form an integrated instructional approach. The course's goals and objectives are achieved through the explicit integration of out-of-class activities delivered through the use of learning technologies and in-class activities. The degree to which the design of hybrid courses utilizes traditional classroom and online learning environments varies. *ACI* defines Hybrid as a course in which **20 to 49%** of its curriculum is delivered online and the student has at least one day of FTF class per week. The students will have an in person class per week and will never be out of contact with their instructor longer than 6 days. Most of ACI programs are setup where the students attend lab every other day and study online on the days they are studying lecture for their FTF classes. The instructors must return calls or emails of the students within 24 hours answering student questions. If necessary, instructors will make appointment for the students to meet them during their office hours normally within 24 hours. Instructors who teach on weekends only will have their office hours during weekends. Student learning is assessed at the formative level using end of chapter testing and quizzing. MA Program students attend their lecture portion of their program online at their location of choosing where their time online is monitored and recorded via software. However, HVAC students must attend their lecture portion of their program online at ACI's computer lab where they clock in and out and are monitored by a trained ACI employee. Students' passing of the chapter testing and quizzing is further proof that the student has spent the time to read the chapter and is in title to receiving the clock hours assigned to the lecture for that chapter. These hours count towards the total number of clock hours necessary for the student to graduate and are added to the number of hours students spent in FTF class environment. These quantitative data are closely analyzed and used as gauges in assessing how to improve the overall quality of the courses or programs.

D. Asynchronous Communication

Asynchronous Communication is a mode of telecommunications in which a simultaneous presence of individuals is not required for communication to take place. Examples are e-mail, discussion forums, text messaging, and recordings. With these technologies, students can communicate at their own pace using web-based tools such as online Chat and web conferencing.

E. Synchronous Communication

Synchronous Communication is a mode of scheduled direct telecommunication in

which a simultaneous presence of individuals is required for communication to take place. Examples are web-based tools such as online Chat and web conferencing.

III. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

A. Accreditation Notices

ACI's online/distance degree programs are initiated by notifying the Counsel on Occupational Education (COE) to request an evaluation of an offering as a major or substantive change. Accordingly, *ACI* will further comply with any and all additional accreditation requirements and/or standards imposed on it and its departments for online/distance course delivery.

B. Adequacy of Technical Support and Facilities

ACI will provide adequate technology for its online/distance course offerings through the its online course providers as well as other facilities that are required and accessible to both faculty and students. ACI and it's online course providers are equipped with technology (i.e., software. equipment and facilities) appropriate for instructor and student interaction; ACI provides the appropriate facilities to accommodate curricular commitments and technical assistance is available students and faculty with their use of the online course providers' Learning Management Systems (LMS).

IV. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The curriculum and instruction of online/distance courses will be fully comparable in rigor to the same curriculum delivered on the *ACI* campus. The following principles will apply:

- **Course Overview and Introduction**

  The overall design of the course will be made clear to the students at the beginning of the course.

- **Learning Objectives**

  Learning objectives will be measurable and clearly stated. Learning objectives will clearly describe what students are expected to know or should be able to do by the end of the course.

- **Assessment and Measurement**

  Assessment strategies are designed by the online course providers and/or ACI to evaluate student progress by reference to stated learning

objectives; to measure the effectiveness of student learning; and will be an integral part of the learning process.

- **Instructional Materials**
  Institutional materials will be sufficiently comprehensive to achieve stated course objectives.

- **Learner Interaction and Engagement**

  Forms of interaction incorporated in the course will be designed to motivate students and to promote learning.

- **Course Technology**

  Course navigation and technology will support student engagement and ensure access.

- **Learner Support**

  The course will facilitate student access to institutional support services essential to student success.

- **Accessibility**

  The course will demonstrate a commitment to accessibility for all students.

A. *ACI* Program Committee

Online/distance courses and programs are derived from a collaborative partnership between the online course providers, department, *ACI* Program Committee, and collaborative partners.

ACI Program Committee members are credentialed Instructors, technicians and employers in their fields. Assurance of quality and standards for online/distance programs and courses are provided by this committee.

B. Announcement of Course Offerings

ACI will announce and market online/distance courses to the general public through established protocol as traditional on-campus courses. An online/distance and/or on-campus orientation shall be provided and/or required at the outset of each online semester expressly for student preparation and readiness to take full or blended online courses.

C. Marketing of *ACI* Online Courses

ACI will develop a specific set of provisions based on pertinent rules, regulations, services and conditions to govern the marketing of online/distance courses. Additionally, the marketing and advertising of online/distance courses will adhere to the same protocol required for traditional courses and degree programs at *ACI*.

D. Assessable Tools, Materials and Resources

ACI will provide and make available to online/distance learning students Website address provided by the online course providers and give the students access to their course material and tests.

E. Asynchronous and Synchronous Provisions

When utilizing asynchronous communications, the facilitator/instructor will post a schedule of availability, office/virtual hours, statement of minimum response time and preferences for responding (i.e., to email, chats, etc.). Where synchronous communications are utilized, the facilitator/instructor's communication source will come from a range of online options that are available (e.g., Skype, Live Text, Pal Talk, etc.). The facilitator will also post a companion schedule.

V. FACULTY SUPPORT

A. Faculty Workload for Online/Distance Delivery Support

ACI faculty workload for teaching online/distance learning courses will be as follows:

- Online/distance courses will be included in faculty normal course loads for online courses taught on campus using online course provider's Learning Management System (LMS) such as Pearson's Connect, etc. Online/distance courses where students are off campus will.

B. Recommended Maximum Faculty Course Loads and Class Size

ACI recommends the following maximum course loads per online/distance program period:

- Online/distance program period may vary. It is recommended that no faculty be allowed to teach more than two online/distance courses, in addition to his/her regular (traditional classroom (f2f)) teaching load as prescribed by ACI. Exceptions may be made based on the actual f2f course load of the faculty. Such exception must be approved by the program's department head and School Director.

ACI recommends the following maximum class size for a fully delivered online/distance course:

- Due to the coordination of and reliance on technology, computer equipment and software, together with traditional pedagogy and instruction, online/distance course delivery provides for a unique form of course delivery. Due to its uniqueness, consideration of class size is critical in assuring and/or maintaining standards of quality. Therefore, it is recommended that the maximum class size of thirty-five **(35)** for a program.

C. Faculty Compensation

Faculty compensation for developing, designing and teaching online/distance courses will be as follows:

- See Faculty handbook for further information on this section.

D. Evaluation of Faculty Participating in Online/Distance Delivery

Faculty who choose to participate in online/distance course delivery are expected to undergo performance evaluations for the purpose of maintaining quality course delivery and thereby enhancing student retention and success. The evaluation of faculty shall be in accordance with the process set forth in the Evaluation and Assessment section of this policy.

E. Support for Faculty Participating in Online/Distance Delivery

ACI will provide support for faculty involved in online/distance education in the following ways:

- If needed, priority consideration will be given to new technology purchases and updates.

- Priority technical support will be provided in the maintenance of delivery systems by the online course providers.

- Ongoing leadership support will be provided when based on periodic faculty training seminars, a strong support staff dedicated to faculty online/distance learning concerns.

- As needed, other forms of support will be provided by the academic department and the campus director will be provided.

F. Training of Faculty for Online/Distance Education Delivery

In order to develop high quality online/distance education courses and programs, faculty must have sufficient time to develop the course and to receive training in the

technology used to deliver the course.

Technological support for faculty includes on-going orientation and training programs available through ACI's online program providers. Also, if applicable, there will be opportunities for one-on-one technological assistance, available for faculty through ACI's online program providers' trained technicians available during lab hours on campus.

All faculty involved in online/distance education courses must be proficient in the delivery of this type of education and should possess a working knowledge in the design of online/distance education courses.

Faculty teaching online/distance courses must be proficient in the following basic computer skills prior to beginning the course:

- Working knowledge of computer used to teach online courses;

- Computer file management;

- Document preparation;

- E-mail; and

- Web browsing

Faculty members utilizing course cartridges, compressed video or other media delivery must be proficient in the following areas:

- Operation of the equipment;

- Video etiquette;

- Presentation techniques;

- Contingency planning for equipment breakdown and problems;

- Class interaction strategies;

- Proctor responsibilities; and

- Contact information

G. Responsibility of Department/Program Regarding Faculty Readiness For Online/Distance Delivery

It is the responsibility of the campus director to ensure that instructors have the indicated requisite skills necessary to deliver online/distance education courses. Faculty may become proficient in the development and delivery of online/distance education

courses and programs, web delivery and compressed video delivery by successfully completing online course provider training documents.

Finally, *ACI* faculty must realize that the decision to use online/distance learning will be made on a course-by-course basis, with consideration given to the content of the course, the needs of the learners, and the flexibility of the delivery mechanism. The exciting and rewarding part of designing and implementing online/distance education for instructors, as content experts, is the opportunity to see their discipline from new perspectives and to revitalize their teaching methodology.

VI. STUDENT SUPPORT

A. Notice to Prospective Students Regarding Support Services at *ACI*

Prior to admission, students may contact ACI and obtain information regarding the various student support services provided by the institution. Also, students will be provided with information regarding how to contact faculty and advisors.

B. Administrative Support Towards Completion of the Online/Distance Program

The *ACI* Office of Admissions and the Office of the Registrar will be responsible for providing information and assistance to students interested in completing a diploma or certificate online.

The Office of financial aid is responsible for providing information and assistance to students who are interested in applying for financial assistance. The Office of Financial Aid further provides ongoing support and resources for any student throughout their entire tenure. Currently, students preparing to seek a certificate or diploma or take courses online at *ACI* should inquire and/or apply for assistance under the normal process for obtaining financial aid.

C. Technical Facilities, Faculty and Budgetary Support for the Online Process

ACI is committed to supporting the student through the continuation of the program by providing adequate facilities and faculty support as well as budgetary allocations. Assistance can be provided in a face-to-face meeting or at a distance via phone conference or email communication within 24 hours of student request. In some instances it may take longer than 24 hours to resolve an issue, however the student will be replied to within 24 hours.

D. Adequate Notice to Students Regarding Qualifications, Required Technology and Competence and Program Costs

Each department offering degrees and/or courses online is responsible for providing information to students regarding the qualification and technology as well as the technical competence required before participating in an online/distance course or program. Faculty syllabus will provide the necessary information regarding the technology needed for student success in navigating through the course.

E. Notice to Students Regarding the Nature of Online/Distance Learning

Before entering a program or enrolling in a course, the prospective online/distance student(s) must review ACI catalog and this document regarding the nature of the online/distance learning environment. Also, the student(s) will be given an online/distance readiness "checklist" and/or a "questionnaire".

F. Student Services to Address Challenges of Online/Distance Learning

It is apparent that the very nature of online/distance learning creates challenges for the online student. *ACI* recognizes some, if not all of these challenges, and therefore provides appropriate services to address those challenges, many of which may be found by contacting ACI.

G. Creating a Sense of Community for the Online/Distance Student

It is important for students who are learning through an online/distance environment be made to feel a part of the overall campus community. The nature of ACI's hybrid programs causes students to attend classes on campus and stay a part of ACI community. Also, *ACI* has in place the various student services mentioned earlier that are available to the online/distance learning student in a similar manner as they are for students who are physically on campus. Also, *ACI*'s faculty is encouraged to promote study groups and also allow students to communicate with each other. The institution will provide ongoing information regarding events on campus that are open to the public. The institution encourages online/distance students to participate in graduation ceremonies and other campus events. The learning needs of students educated online/distance are often identified by using instruments such as fact sheets or questionnaires designed to obtain the information necessary to appropriately assist students.

VII. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Online/distance courses will be evaluated according to the standards utilized for Regular courses and identified by Consul on Occupational Education (COE). Evaluation and Assessment of electronically delivered courses, faculty and programs take place in the context of the policies and procedures of all existing academic programs. It is not the intent of this policy to supplant any existing policies set forth by *ACI*, but where necessary, to define new or to expand existing policies and procedures to ensure the most effective implementation and support of online/distance courses and programs. Multiple assessment methods, including frequent interaction between the instructors and students through electronic means, telephone, or in-person

channels will be highlighted.

A. Assessment of Activities and Student Achievement Compared to Intended Learning Outcomes

The ability of a student to succeed in an online/distance education class depends on his or her ability to understand the class structure, the technology and the assessment measures. Informing students of what skills and technology are needed for particular online/distance education courses and using formative and summative measures to inform them on how they progress in the online/distance course will allow them the opportunity to do a self-assessment of their capability to succeed in the course. This will improve student retention and success in the online course or program.

B. Evaluating the Level of Student Learning

Evaluating student learning depends on defining measurable learning outcomes and then assessing students against the expected outcomes stated. Course content and learning outcomes are well-aligned and appropriate to the level of the course and the levels of the learners. For MA Program student's time spent in the online course is tracked using the online LMS software tracking clock and for HVAC Program student's time spent in the online course is tracked using sign in sheet at the computer lab on ACI campus and their learning is assessed at the formative level using end of chapter testing and quizzing. The quizzing of the students will verify the student's activity in the online program and prove that their time spent and recorded in the online software or in the sign in sheet was effective towards their learning of the subject on hand. These hours recorded by the online software or computer lab sign in sheet will count towards the total number of clock hours necessary for the student to graduate. These quantitative data are closely analyzed and used as gauges in assessing how to improve the overall quality of the courses or programs. Currently the LMS software used for HVAC program is NCCERconnect and for MA program is McGraw-Hill Connect. In future ACI may migrate its online courses to a single LMS such as Canvas or Moodle to consolidate its LMS software into one. Any new LMS software which ACI acquires will have the capability to track student time spent and ensure activity by the students while being in the online LMS.

ACI instructors should design assessments for students that incorporate a variety of feedback methods that are appropriate to the task. For example, reading activities involving web-based materials might use self-graded quizzes with links to answers, while large-scale projects might involve hand on skill evaluations. Criteria for graded assessments should be clearly communicated. Rapid feedback can often be obtained by using simple communication methods such as phone calls, e-mail, and in person conversations.

C. Evaluating Satisfaction with the Content and Delivery of the Course Experience

Evaluating the course content and delivery effectiveness in improving Online Student Learning Outcomes (OSLO) involves getting honest and direct feedback from

students on what worked well for them and what needs improvement. While such feedback should always be tempered by the judgment of the teaching professional, this feedback when constructively considered can be invaluable in re-thinking course components.

Academic regulations require that students evaluate every program, including online/distance education courses. Currently, traditional SOT forms are administered during a scheduled class meeting, or mailed, or a web-based SOT format is used for Internet courses. *ACI* uses in class paper SOT that is administered during exit interview and/or program evaluation and focuses on the following qualitative/quantitative data collection questions:

a) Were discussions and interactions with faculty and peers satisfactory during course or program duration?

b) Did actual learning experiences match expectations of the class?

c) Is the learner satisfied with the services they are receiving (e.g. advising, registration, access to course content, technical support, etc.)?

d) Was learner adequately oriented on how to learn effectively online?

e) Were course learning outcomes useful for career, professional and academic development?

f) To what extent were library and learning resources used appropriately by the program's students?

D. Secure Login and Security of Exams and Course Activities

ACI Online uses the Pearson's NCCERConnect and MC Graw Hill's Connect registration system. Through these systems, all students who register for a course have been assigned a unique identification. Pursuant to this process, prior to entering the system, students must logon using their USER ID and password that is unique to only that student.

VIII. PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS MEASURES

A. Measuring Program Effectiveness

Overall program effectiveness is determined by using different measures.

Online/Distance Education Course Fact Sheets will be created for each online/distance education program at *ACI* based upon information submitted by the Instructor and Student Services department. These will be the primary data used for

evaluating online programs and for reporting.

Online/Distance Education Course Fact Sheets will contain general information about the class, what specific skills a student should possess, and the hardware and software requirements necessary to participate in the course. The fact sheets will also provide the instructor's name, e-mail, and phone number so students can contact the instructor with any questions regarding requirements prior to registering for the course. Students are encouraged to review the fact sheet for online/distance education courses before registering. Registration will constitute the student's acceptance of the requirements necessary to participate in the course.

Academic departments will evaluate online/distance education course and program proposals for:

- appropriateness within the diploma or certification program or as a stand-alone service course;

- suitable course content and sufficient rigor;

- appropriate use of technology in course delivery;

- the extent to which student learning matches intended outcomes, including diploma or certification programs both the goals of general education and the objectives of the major;

- results from students' routine end-of-course and program evaluations;

- documentation concerning access provided to students not previously served, through a combination of enrollment records, student surveys, and student outcomes

B. Institutional Evaluation of Online/Distance Learning Programs Will Be Consistent with the Evaluation of All *ACI* Academic Programs

ACI will review the effectiveness of its online/distance education programs to assure alignment with its institutional mission and priorities.

IX. OTHER PROVISIONS

A. Hiring of Adjunct Faculty

The hiring of adjunct faculty to teach online/distance courses shall be consistent with *ACI*'s current policies governing the hiring of such faculty, except as provided by any partnership agreements between *ACI* and third parties (See: *ACI* faculty handbook).

B. Display of Academic Online/Distance Calendar

ACI shall provide in its catalog online/distance information regarding an academic calendar for each term in which courses or offered for an online/distance diploma or certification seeking program. It shall be the responsibility of each academic program to ensure that such information is provided to students prior to admission into the program.

C. Privacy of Students Enrolled in Online Programs/Courses

ACI is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of information in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended *(see ACI - FERPA)*