

Policy for Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education

Effective Date: 7/11/12; Revised: 10/15/2021 ; June 2022

SCOPE

This policy applies to all credit-bearing distance learning courses and programs offered by the University of South Alabama, beginning with the application for admission and continuing through to a student's graduation, transfer, or withdrawal from study.

PURPOSE OF POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the University of South Alabama operates in compliance with the provisions of the United States Federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), Public Law 110-315 concerning the verification of student identity in distance learning.

All credit-bearing courses and programs offered through distance learning methods must verify that the student who registers for a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. One or more of the following methods would be used:

- a) An individual secure login and password (i.e. J-number and password)
- b) Proctored examinations (i.e. [USAonline Proctoring Center](#))
- c) Other technologies and practices approved by the Office of Academic Affairs that have been shown to be effective in verifying student identification.
- d) Pedagogical and related practices that are effective in verifying student identity (faculty review, questioning students, etc.)

Secure Login and Password

Each student has their own assigned J-number and student-generated password to log into learning management systems.

Proctored Examinations

The University's Policy and Procedures for Online Proctoring should be used as a guiding reference for proctored examinations.

New or Emerging Technologies

Third party vendors that provide robust identity verification software services (e.g., services similar to those used in the financial sector) are vetted through the Innovation in Learning Center and various options are available for use by the Colleges.

Pedagogical and Related Practices

Online instructors have a responsibility to identify changes in students. Examples

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of changes could be a sudden change in academic performance, change in writing style or odd statements by students in discussions or email. These can be addressed by using more than one kind of assignment asking students to share important ideas learned from references, and other types of authentic assessments. The Innovation in Learning Center website maintains resources to assist faculty in designing assessments.

Privacy Protection

All methods of verifying student identity in distance learning must protect the privacy of student information. Students must be notified in writing at the time of registration or enrollment of any fees associated with the verification of student identity.

Personally identifiable information collected by the university may be used, at the discretion of the institution, as the basis for identity verification. For instance, a student requesting that their learning system password be reset may be asked to provide two or more pieces of information for comparison with data on file, or to come to the Computer Services Center Help Desk in person with a photo ID or verification.

RESPONSIBILITIES

All users of the university's learning management systems are responsible for maintaining the security of usernames, passwords and any other access credentials assigned. The J-number (student ID) is not a secure credential and may be displayed at various areas in the learning management system. The password used to enter the system IS a secure credential. Access passwords may not be shared or given to anyone other than the user to whom they were assigned to for any reason.

Users are responsible for any and all uses of their account. Users are responsible for changing passwords periodically to maintain security. Users are held responsible for knowledge of the information contained within the most recent University Catalog as well as the Student Handbook. Failure to read university guidelines, requirements and regulations will not exempt users from responsibility. Students are responsible for providing accurate and true information about themselves in any identity verification process.

Faculty teaching courses through distance education methods have the primary responsibility for ensuring that their courses comply with the provisions of this policy. Faculty are responsible for informing the Office of Academic Affairs of any new technologies being used to verify student identity, so that published information on student privacy can be maintained appropriately, and so that the university can

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coordinate resources and services efficiently.

Because technology and personal accountability may not verify identity absolutely or ensure academic integrity completely, faculty are encouraged, when feasible and pedagogically sound, to design courses that employ assignments and evaluations unique to the course and that support academic integrity.

Deans and directors of college-level units are responsible for ensuring that faculty are aware of this policy and comply with its provisions. Deans and directors are also responsible for ensuring that academic awards and degree programs within their units comply with the provisions of this policy.

The Office of Academic Affairs is responsible for ensuring university-wide compliance with the provisions of this policy and that deans and directors are informed of any changes in a timely fashion. The Office of Academic Affairs is responsible for publishing university-wide information on how identity verification processes protect student privacy. The Office of Academic Affairs is also responsible for coordinating and promoting efficient use of university resources and services, and for ensuring that university level processes (e.g., admissions or registration) also remain in compliance with this policy.

The Office of the Registrar is responsible to notify students AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.

COMPLIANCE

In accordance with the responsibilities outlined above, deans and directors of college-level units are expected to ensure that all faculty and staff within their units remain in compliance with this policy. The University of South Alabama should have in place appropriate policies to promote the academic integrity of its online courses. Those policies should be widely disseminated throughout the university.

Training for Faculty and Students

The university should provide faculty with appropriate training to use pedagogical approaches and technology to promote academic integrity. Additionally, the university should provide information to students regarding information security and being held accountable for academic integrity. Syllabi and orientations should include information for students to understand issues for each online course and the university as a whole.

FREQUENCY OF REVIEW AND UPDATE

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This policy will be reviewed annually by the Office of Academic Affairs for continued alignment with the appropriate federal regulations and policies and revised as necessary.