

# ST. JOHN FISHER UNIVERSITY

## ONLINE & HYBRID EDUCATION HANDBOOK

### ONLINE AND HYBRID EDUCATION: PURPOSE & GOALS

The purpose of this handbook is to outline the policies and guidelines that assure the greater likelihood for high-quality delivery of online and hybrid education at St. John Fisher University. Fisher approaches its online learning activities with the recognition of its mission to provide “teaching, learning, and scholarship in a student-centered educational environment.”

The goals of Fisher’s online and hybrid learning options include, but are not limited to, enhancing the traditional on-campus personalized learning experiences of our undergraduate students with skills that will be required in a twenty-first century workplace, increasing access to non-traditional students, and creating flexible program offerings for graduate and completion degrees.

Fisher’s online and hybrid programs and courses are integrated into the functioning of the University, and are academically responsible, expandable, and meet the financial and academic needs of the institution. Fisher’s online and hybrid learning activities follow well-documented best practices, including those found in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s “Distance Education Programs: *Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)*” as well as standards set forth by accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), and the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE). While each School at Fisher has its own paradigm for quality of course design, the emphasis is on consistency with some flexibility. To those ends, the courses that are offered in the online and hybrid modality meet the same quality standards as those that apply to campus-based instruction.

### DEFINING ONLINE & HYBRID EDUCATION AT FISHER

Fisher defines an online learning course as one that is taught primarily through the campus course management system, Brightspace, with the incorporation of other appropriate educational technologies and that requires no face-to-face meetings on campus throughout the duration of the course. These courses are generally taught in an asynchronous fashion, meaning that students complete the given tasks and assignments at a time that is convenient for them within a given time period defined by the instructor, usually a specific week in the term. Some online courses may also utilize synchronous technologies that allow for real-time communication through the web using web cams and microphones, often used for student group meetings, student presentations, or guest speakers. Faculty may also use synchronous sessions to administer office hours with students. Some online or hybrid programs may have required synchronous meeting times as a required component of each course. Please check the course schedule for details.

Because the classroom environment changes when courses are taught fully online, the role of the faculty member transitions to a coaching and mentoring role, allowing learners to actively participate in class discussions and activities. Typically, online courses at Fisher will include multiple assessment

opportunities, including discussions, projects, presentations, and group work. Assessments will be administered continuously throughout the term of the course ensuring that students receive frequent feedback on their progress. Students taking online courses at Fisher should also experience multiple interactions, including student-to-content, student-to-instructor, and student-to-student communications.

The lack of seat-time in an online course can make it difficult to conceptualize the amount of work that happens on a weekly basis. Faculty at Fisher utilize a time-on-task analysis method to determine how long, on average, students may take engaging with course material (e.g., reading a shared text), participating in instructional methods (e.g., formally writing an initial discussion board post), completing assessments (e.g., constructing a PowerPoint presentation for the end-of-semester project), etc. Students should expect to spend approximately 10 hours of time each week participating in course-related activities in a three-credit hour semester-long online course and approximately 20 hours per week in three credit hour courses that are offered in a seven-week term.

Fisher defines hybrid courses as those that reduce some portion of the normal seat time and replace that time with online activities, including asynchronous discussions and other technologically enhanced activities. The amount of seat time reduction may vary anywhere from 33% to 66%. The online activities in a hybrid course will look very similar to work conducted in a fully online course, therefore many of the same design strategies previously described for online courses also apply to hybrid courses. Similarly, a time-on-task analysis is also used in the design of hybrid courses to ensure the total learning time is equivalent regardless of the modality in which the course is delivered.

## GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY TEACHING ONLINE & HYBRID COURSES

The nature of online and hybrid courses, including the lack of a physical presence on campus and specific meeting times and locations for some or all the course activities, requires guidelines to ensure consistency among faculty in the process of administering online courses at Fisher. The following guidelines ensure that online and hybrid courses are taught in consistent and high-quality ways:

- The [academic calendar](#) for online and hybrid courses closely follows the traditional academic calendar of the University. Online courses are taught in either a 7-week or 14-week calendar during all three semesters (i.e., Fall, Spring and Summer). Hybrid courses may be taught during a variety of course lengths; 7-week or 14-week calendars during the fall and spring semesters and 6-week or 12-week calendars during the summer semester.
- Instructors of online and hybrid courses should monitor that all students have completed the Online & Hybrid Student Orientation in Brightspace prior to starting any activities in their own courses. This orientation course will give students a chance to engage with key topics, such as technology requirements, how to be an effective online learner, and academic services and policies. Instructors teaching online and hybrid courses may self-enroll in the Online & Hybrid Student Orientation module in order to verify which students have completed the Orientation Self-Assessment. An instructor may choose to award points based on the completion of that task in their own course grading scheme.
- Online and hybrid courses within Brightspace may be made available for student viewing prior to the start date of the course. However, students should not be required to complete any assignments or begin active participation in the course prior to the start date other than the

orientation module. It is expected that class begins on the start date listed in the academic calendar. Assignments that are due during the first week of the course should be limited to the amount of work a student can reasonably expect to complete if they began work on the first day of the course.

- If there is a scheduled University break or holiday during the term, students in an online or hybrid course should not be required to perform course related tasks during that time. The Brightspace course may be left available for students to access but is not required to be monitored by the faculty or students in the course.
- Online and hybrid courses at Fisher should include aspects of social, cognitive, and teaching presence while creating a sense of community among all learners. It is important to create a thoughtful sequence (weekly or otherwise) of course activities (e.g., lectures, readings, discussions, assessments) that allows some student flexibility, while maintaining the benefits of a community of learners as they progress through course content. In addition, this sequence of course activities are essential to successful online course facilitation. While content may be visible for students to read ahead, activities that involve active participation (blogs, discussions, VoiceThread, etc.) should be made available within a set timeframe (i.e., weekly) to engage all learners on a common topic. This will prevent students from working ahead independently without peer interaction and will focus the group on the specific topics of that week, which will result in better discussion and small group collaboration in the course. Fisher's online courses should avoid a self-paced design model.
- Formative and summative feedback should be on-going and spread throughout the entire term of the course to ensure that students receive frequent updates on their progression in the course. Summative assessments at the end of the term (i.e., a final exam, presentation, research paper, etc.) should be scheduled to ensure a sufficient amount of time for grading and submission of final grades by the dates listed in the online academic calendar.
- Faculty presence in an online course and the online portion of a hybrid course is essential to creating a successful online learning environment. Faculty are encouraged to respond to student inquiries within 24 hours for 7-week courses and within 48 hours for 14-week courses. Faculty are also encouraged to grade student work and provide feedback on student progress within 7 days following the assignment due date. Please be aware that for 7-week courses, even the 7-day turn around may not be adequate to provide student feedback on assignments that scaffold throughout the term.
- Faculty are encouraged to have at least one proctored event in the design of their online courses. A proctored event may include any technology where the instructor can see and hear the student using audio and video to verify their identity (i.e., Zoom, VoiceThread) or a proctored exam.
- Faculty should abide by the policy on reporting of attendance for all students per the Registrar's policies and practices posted on the University website. In online courses, attendance is defined as active participation in the course activities, most commonly in a discussion forum within the course. The sole act of logging into the Brightspace course does not qualify as attendance on its own.
- Faculty should abide by the University policy on office hours ([Faculty Statutes Section 6.4 Classroom Expectations](#)) and make themselves readily available to students throughout the term of the course. This may be done through phone, email and/or Zoom.
- Faculty need to be mindful of students needing accommodations in the creation and selection of

the course materials and resources used in their online and hybrid courses. All materials used in these courses must comply with University policy.

- Course evaluations for online and hybrid courses will follow the same policies and procedures that apply to all courses. The same online platform used to administer campus course evaluations will be used to administer online course evaluations. Slight wording changes in specific questions on the evaluation are made to account for the lack of seat time, but the intended nature of any question on the evaluation will not be altered.

## INITIAL APPROVAL PROCESS FOR ONLINE/HYBRID PROGRAMS & COURSES

Those Schools looking to propose the creation of an online or hybrid program should utilize the University policy for program approval. Online and hybrid programs follow the same policy in this regard as any other program. See [Recommended Guidelines for New Program Development](#), under the Dean & Faculty Resources section of the Provost's website.

The determination to offer individual courses online or hybrid outside of a fully online or hybrid program (i.e., the selection, frequency, and eligibility to teach) is a matter of academic policy that can have substantive implications for resources and other matters. Subject to policies and restrictions established by the School, this determination is made at the department level consistent with the normal discretion of the School Dean and the Provost.

## ONLINE/HYBRID COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In addition to School specific processes, all online and hybrid courses, both as part of an online program or individual online courses, will follow the course development process outlined below. The review and approval by the instructor developing the course and a DePeters Family Center staff member is required of new courses that are a part of a fully online/ hybrid program and recommended (but not required) for all other online/ hybrid courses. The Department Chair/Program Director, or a designee of their choosing with expertise in the course content area, will also need to review and approve the course prior to its first offering. Approval of a course does not ensure that it will be offered in any particular semester. The determination to offer a course resides within the department and School. Courses may be cancelled subject to low enrollment. Department Chair/Program Directors must file a change of modality form with the Registrar's Office for any course offered on the ground that becomes an online or hybrid offering. Compensation to teach online and hybrid courses will be consistent with the procedures for campus courses.

## FIRST TIME NEW COURSE DEVELOPMENT

1. **Completion of Application for Online/Hybrid Course Development Form:** Faculty and Department Chair complete the Application for Online/Hybrid Course Development form prior to the start of any course development or training activities. The Department Chair must seek Dean and Provost final approval of the form.
  - a. Intellectual Property Agreement: This statement must be agreed to for the development of courses offered within fully online or hybrid programs but may be optional on

individual online or hybrid offerings. A stipend for course development will not be paid without an intellectual property agreement.

- b. Any payment for training and course development is at the discretion of the Department Chair, Dean, and Provost.

2. **Online/Hybrid Faculty Training:** Once fully approved, the Application for Online/Hybrid Course Development form will be shared with the Provost's Office, who will forward the completed form to the DePeters Family Center. A DePeters Family Center staff member will contact individual faculty to arrange for training and discuss the course development plan.

Training Requirements:

- a. Faculty participates and completes the *Fundamentals of Online Teaching* course (offered at least twice a year—once in the early spring semester and early fall semester).
- b. A development shell is created in Brightspace by a DePeters Family Center staff member where faculty can begin developing course materials and organizing content.
- c. Faculty attends training sessions on technologies as needed (including Brightspace, Yuja, Zoom, VoiceThread, etc.).

3. **Online/Hybrid Course Development Review:** The course review and sign-off process proceeds as follows and is required for all new courses that are part of a fully online/ hybrid program (and recommended for all other online/ hybrid courses):

- a. When the course is fully developed (must be at least 80% complete for review to begin), but prior to the course start date, the faculty member completes a self-review of the course using the Online/Hybrid Course Development Rubric. Once the self-review is completed, they will notify the DePeters Family Center.
- b. A DePeters Family Center staff member reviews the course according to the same Online/Hybrid Course Development Rubric and arranges a time to meet with the faculty to review the course and the rubric feedback. The staff member will complete the sign-off portion of the Application for Online/Hybrid Course Development form including the date that training and course development were completed and then forwards to the Provost's Office. The staff member will also notify the Department Chair/Program Director that the course development stage is completed.

\* NOTE: The review by the DePeters Family Center staff member is intended to ensure consistency in the quality and success of online and hybrid course delivery, it is not content focused.

- c. The Department Chair/Program Director or designee of their choosing will also review the course according to the Online/Hybrid Course Development Rubric to ensure the learning outcomes, content, and assessments are consistent with the campus-based version of the same course and meets all other department/school requirements.
- d. After course sign-off is complete, the course may be copied from the development shell into the actual course shell where students are enrolled, and the course may begin. If a stipend is to be paid, the Provost's Office will proceed with arranging payment at the start of the semester of the first offering. Payments for course development will not be awarded prior to the first offering of the course.

## SUBSEQUENT ONLINE/HYBRID COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Faculty that have successfully developed and completed the review process with at least one online or hybrid course at Fisher may develop additional courses without participating in the *Fundamentals of Online Teaching* course again. However, faculty must complete the Application for Online/Hybrid Course Development for each course that is proposed, including all necessary intellectual property agreements where applicable, and complete the Online/Hybrid Course Development Review process listed above. Payment for additional course development is at the discretion of the School Dean and Provost.

## TRAINING OF FACULTY TO TEACH ONLINE/HYBRID WITHOUT COURSE DEVELOPMENT

In the situation where a course has already been developed for the online or hybrid environment, but additional faculty need to be trained to deliver the course, such faculty must still participate in the *Fundamentals of Online Teaching* course. Payment for completion of training is at the discretion of the School Dean and Provost.

NOTE: Any faculty may choose to participate in these training activities; however, any stipends for participation will not be awarded until course development or assignment to teach an online course is complete.

## PERIODIC REVIEW OF ONLINE/HYBRID COURSE DESIGN

It is recommended that all online and hybrid courses should be reviewed for overall course design updates, technology selection, and evolving online/hybrid best practices every five years, above and beyond any normal course/program evaluation procedures as determined by each School. The DePeters Family Center staff are available to assist in periodic reviews of courses and/or programs at the request of either an individual faculty, department chair, program director, or dean. This may include using the Online & Hybrid Course Development Rubric as a tool for review and/or following the review process established with a curriculum review committee. Please contact the DePeters Family Center ([cite@sjf.edu](mailto:cite@sjf.edu)) with these requests.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

The DePeters Family Center continually offers workshops to promote best pedagogical practices. Student learning outcomes are assessed, and faculty use this information to make evidence-based improvements to future offerings. In addition, each program is reviewed following the normal course/program evaluation procedures established in each of the Schools. Course evaluations and other survey instruments are used to collect information from students about the quality of instruction, support services, and their overall satisfaction with their online Fisher experience.

## GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS TAKING ONLINE & HYBRID COURSES

### STUDENT ELIGIBILITY TO TAKE ONLINE & HYBRID COURSES

In order for an undergraduate student to be eligible to take an online course, he or she should have sophomore status or above. No such restriction applies to graduate students.

There are no restrictions on students registering for hybrid courses.

### ONLINE STUDENT READINESS ASSESSMENT

Online courses require a specific skill set, both technological and personal, that traditional campus-based courses may not. Therefore, students who are curious about online courses are encouraged to complete the Online Course Readiness Assessment to evaluate their own personal fit for the online learning environment. Students are encouraged to complete this assessment and review their personalized feedback with their advisor prior to registering for any online course offering. Students should specifically consult with their advisor if they wish to take more than one online course in a given semester, unless enrolled in a fully online program.

### ONLINE & HYBRID STUDENT ORIENTATION

The Online & Hybrid Student Orientation is available for students to self-enroll in within Brightspace. The orientation includes information on technology requirements and instructions, tips for being a successful online learner, and links to academic policies and campus services. The orientation, located in Brightspace, is available to them throughout the time they are taking online/hybrid courses so it may be used as a reference at any time, although they only need to successfully complete the Orientation Self-Assessment one time. Course instructors will monitor to ensure students complete the orientation prior to the start of the course. Students will be reminded to complete orientation through a general announcement two weeks prior to each semester.

### VERIFICATION OF ONLINE STUDENT IDENTITY

In order to assist students in understanding their legal and ethical responsibilities as online participants in the academic community, and in compliance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act, specifically Public Law 110-35, St. John Fisher University has developed the Verification of Online Student Identify Policy. The full policy can be found [here](#).