

Criteria Matrix for Approving Synchronous Online and Dual-Mode Courses

To be used by Deans' Offices

At Saint Louis University, most distance courses¹ are offered in an asynchronous online format, which provides the most accessible option for distance learners. On a limited basis, distance courses may be offered in a **synchronous online**² or **dual-mode**³ format, with approval of a Dean (or their designee).⁴ This document was developed by the University's Distance Education Committee to support Deans in their discernment about whether a synchronous online or dual-mode course format is appropriate for a given context. Dean approval is generally good for only the term for which the course was proposed.

Overview: In general, the criteria matrix assumes that in-person or asynchronous online courses are the default formats for most situations. Criteria in the matrix are informed by the lived experience of SLU faculty who have taught courses in synchronous online or dual-mode distance formats, as well as by the available literature at the time the matrix was developed. The matrix has two sections: **Section 1** addresses different aspects of **context** (program-level and course-level context, as well as educational equity considerations). **Section 2** addresses **operational and compliance expectations** that must be met when synchronous online or dual-mode courses are offered; if the proposed course cannot meet the expectations articulated in Section 2, the Dean should not approve the course to be offered in the proposed format. Most (but not all) criteria apply to both synchronous online and dual-mode format courses. In general, courses offered within a program that is designed intentionally around synchronous online or dual-mode courses do not need to be reviewed on an individual basis. The matrix was designed to support Deans in determining whether a single course, offered within an otherwise in-person or asynchronous online program, should be offered in the proposed format. Questions may be directed to the Distance Education Office (distance.education@slu.edu).

For Instructors: Instructors seeking Deans' approval to offer a synchronous online or dual-mode course should consult with their Dean's office about the appropriate process for requesting approval. Some schools/colleges may incorporate this review into existing curriculum committee/course approval processes; others may require a separate review. The Distance Education Office has created [a proposal template](#) that schools/colleges may wish to adapt for their internal processes. *Note: In general, instructors will need to provide information relevant for each of the criteria below (whether in a proposal form, their course syllabus, or other mechanism) so that Deans have the information they need to make a final determination.*

For Deans or Their Designees: Deans may designate an individual or committee to make approval decisions on their behalf. The matrix below offers a set of descriptive criteria to help determine whether or not the proposed distance format is appropriate for a given situation, but there is no formula for making this decision. Deans should weigh **the totality of circumstances** to determine if the proposed format is appropriate. Approvals should be communicated to the Distance Education Office (distance.education@slu.edu) prior to the term of offering, so the course can undergo any required Distance Course Review steps.

¹ Distance courses are those in which 75% or more of the instruction takes place with the instructor physically separated from the students. *Note: the key distinguishing feature is the separation of the instructor and students; courses in which the instructor and students meet in a physical location other than one of SLU's campuses are not distance courses, because the instructor is in the same location as the students.* Both synchronous online and dual-mode courses are considered distance courses at SLU.

² Synchronous online courses are those in which all members of the course – the instructor(s) and all registered students – meet via web conferencing technology on specific days/times for 75% or more of the class sessions during the term.

³ Dual-mode courses are those for which some students register for and attend class in person and some students register for and participate in the in-person class via web conferencing technology for 75% or more of the class sessions during the term. Dual-mode courses at SLU have two, cross-listed sections in the catalog (one in-person and one online); students must choose whether they will enroll in the in-person section or in the online section of the course and participate in the course via their chosen modality.

⁴ Dean approval is not needed in the event of an institutional shift to Emergency Remote Instruction or in cases where an instructor wishes to allow an individual student to participate remotely in a small number of class sessions, on a temporary basis, due to illness or other personal circumstance.

Section I: Context

In the table below, an “X” indicates that the criterion is relevant to the proposed course format.

Synch OL	Dual-Mode	Criteria	Likely NOT appropriate if . . .	MAY be appropriate if . . .
Program-Level Context				
X	X	Program design	The course is not part of a program that has been intentionally-designed around the proposed format	The course is part of a program that has been intentionally-designed around the proposed format, based on market considerations and effectiveness for student learning and success
X	X	Bridge to a fully-online program	The course is offered in a program that is not on track to become a fully-online; and/or the format is not necessary to support such a transition	The format for the course is necessary on a temporary basis as the program builds demand for a fully online version
	X	Cohort considerations	The program is not cohort-based; students in the in-person section and the remote section likely would have no other connections beyond this course	The program is cohort-based, which means the in-person students and remote students likely will be engaged in other aspects of community-building and peer-to-peer learning (which will make building community across modalities easier)
Course-Level Context				
X		Instructor accommodation	Based largely on convenience or personal desire; based on perceived ease of the format as compared to asynchronous online and/or an unwillingness to adapt the course to an asynchronous online format	Related to an ADA accommodation approved by HR and/or a circumstance that makes converting the course to an asynchronous online format impossible (e.g., emergency situation, instructor was assigned to the course last-minute)
X	X	Pedagogical effectiveness of the proposed format	No/insufficient evidence is provided to show the educational effectiveness of the format	Reliable evidence ⁵ supports the educational effectiveness of the format

⁵ Throughout this document, “reliable evidence” should be understood to be evidence that goes beyond personal anecdote. This may include published, peer-reviewed literature, prior student learning data, or program assessment data.

Synch OL	Dual-Mode	Criteria	Likely NOT appropriate if . . .	MAY be appropriate if . . .
X	X	Pedagogical effectiveness compared to asynchronous online or in-person	No/insufficient evidence is provided to show the chosen format is as/more effective for the intended learning than an asynchronous online format or in-person course would be; an asynchronous online course or a fully in-person course would achieve the intended learning without the challenges posed by the proposed format	Reliable evidence is provided to show the format is as/more effective for the intended learning than an asynchronous online format or a fully in-person course would be
X	X	Course goals and learning outcomes	The course goals and learning outcomes are not well-suited to the format and/or are better suited to an asynchronous online format or a fully in-person course	The course goals and learning outcomes are suited to – and possibly even be enhanced by – the proposed course format (as compared to the asynchronous online format or a fully in-person course)
X	X	Instructional methods	The primary instructional methods can be adapted relatively easily for an asynchronous online format	The primary instructional methods are extremely difficult to replicate effectively in an asynchronous online format
X	X	Student experience	No/insufficient evidence is provided to show the format is distinctively necessary for the intended student experience; a well-designed asynchronous online course could create the intended experience	Reliable evidence is provided to show the specific format is necessary for the intended student experience and that the intended experience cannot be created as effectively in an asynchronous online format
X	X	Class size	Expected course enrollment is likely to impede the instructor’s ability to engage students equitably; enrollment is expected to exceed 20-25 students	Expected course enrollment will not impede the instructor’s ability to engage students equitably (<i>note: in general, more than 20-25 students will create disparities in student participation and will create additional burdens on the instructor</i>)
X	X	Location of students	Expected students are located in geographic areas that will make synchronous participation extremely difficult due to significant time zone differences (e.g., students will be required to participate in class sessions in the middle of the night); students will not be co-located and able to participate in the course as a group from a shared physical location	Expected students are located in geographic areas that allow for appropriate, equitable engagement in a synchronous course without unnecessary difficulties due to time zone differences; and/or students are co-located and will participate in the course as a group from a shared physical location separate from the instructor

Synch OL	Dual-Mode	Criteria	Likely NOT appropriate if . . .	MAY be appropriate if . . .
	X	Student course registration	Students are not able to commit to attending all class sessions exclusively in either the in-person or remote format for the full duration of the term.	Students commit to attending all class sessions exclusively in either the in-person or remote format for the full duration of the term (this means remote students register for and attend remotely for all sessions, and in-person students register for and attend in person for all sessions)
X	X	Enrollment needs	No/insufficient evidence is provided to show the format is necessary for enrollment/retention of students; and/or there is evidence to suggest the format is <i>not</i> appropriate for the market	Evidence is provided to show the proposed format is necessary for enrollment/retention of students and appropriate for market demands; ideally, evidence suggests the format is <i>preferable</i> to asynchronous online for potential/enrolled students.
Educational Equity Considerations				
	X	Parity in course outcomes for remote and in-person students	The instructor provides no/insufficient information about how they will ensure students enrolled in the same course, but in different modalities, will be able to achieve parity in course outcomes	The instructor articulates clearly how they will ensure students enrolled in the same course, but in different modalities, will be able to achieve parity in course outcomes
	X	Engagement between remote and in-person students	The instructor articulates no/insufficient plans for ensuring effective learner-to-learner engagement between/among both in-person and remote students	The instructor articulates clear plans for ensuring effective learner-to-learner engagement between/among both in-person and remote students
X		Engagement in synchronous online sessions	The instructor articulates no/insufficient plans for ensuring effective learner-to-learner engagement in synchronous online sessions	The instructor articulates clear plans for ensuring effective learner-to-learner engagement in synchronous online sessions
X	X	Technology requirements	The technology requirements for the course will/could impose unnecessary or avoidable disparate burdens for the expected students; and/or expected students are located in geographic areas that will/could present significant broadband/high-speed internet challenges to full engagement in synchronous class sessions	The technology requirements for the course are not expected to impose unnecessary or disparate burdens for the expected students; expected students are located in areas that easily support broadband/high-speed internet needed for full engagement in synchronous class sessions
X	X	Missed class due to technology failure	The instructor articulates no/insufficient plans for how students who miss class due to technology failure can engage equitably in the missed learning	The instructor articulates clear plans for how students who miss class due to technology failure can engage equitably in the missed learning

X	X	Cultural considerations <i>(if applicable)</i>	The instructor does not demonstrate awareness of potential cultural barriers to remote engagement in the course and/or does not have a plan for accommodating any different cultural needs	The instructor demonstrates awareness of potential cultural barriers to remote engagement in the course (e.g., safety concerns about recorded class discussions) and articulates a clear plan for accommodating any different cultural needs
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Section II: Additional Expectations

Courses approved to be offered in synchronous online and dual-mode formats must also meet specific operational and compliance requirements. If a course cannot meet these expectations, it should not be approved to be offered in a synchronous online or dual-mode format.

Synch OL	Dual-Mode	Expectation
X	X	Course must be designed in alignment with the Distance Course Design Rubric ⁶ and pass the Distance Course Review process.
	X	Address increased instructor workload before/during class in one of the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign two instructional roles to the course (e.g., two faculty members, one faculty member and one TA, etc.) • Assign additional workload credit for the instructor teaching the course • Adjust the instructor's workload in another area to offset the increased workload burden of the chosen format • Adjust instructor compensation to reflect additional workload
	X	Ensure instructor(s) is/are able to arrive in the classroom and ensure technology is working <i>before</i> the start of the class session <i>(instructor should not teach in back-to-back time slots in two different locations; classroom needs to be available prior to the start of the dual-mode class meeting time)</i>
X	X	Require instructors to collect periodic, formative feedback during the term to ensure changes can be made (if needed) to improve the student experience
X	X	When/before students register, provide information about all technology requirements and any additional fees
X	X	When/before students register, provide information about required meeting days/times

⁶ All synchronous online and dual-mode courses will be expected to pass review using the Distance Course Design Rubric (version 3) after Fall 2023. Such courses offered in Fall 2023 should be designed to align with the rubric's standards, but they are not required to undergo Peer Review.