**Please see the following message sent on behalf of Yvonne Gaudelius, Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education and Kathryn Drager, Interim Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education**

February 18, 2022

Members of ACUE and ACGE,

Starting in fall semester 2022, Penn State will provide undergraduate and graduate instruction only in the approved modes posted at <https://www.registrar.psu.edu/registration/instruction-modes.cfm>. Importantly, this means that remote synchronous instruction will not be an option except for courses being offered through the Digital Learning Cooperative (DLC). There is a task force considering updates to our instructional modes, but any changes will not be available for fall semester.

The fall schedule currently includes about 75 undergraduate and graduate courses listed as DE, the mode we used for remote synchronous courses in fall 2021 and spring 2022[[1]](#footnote-2). The fall 2022 courses that are scheduled as DE are likely the result of the automatic roll of the schedule from fall 2021 to fall 2022. Please work with your schedulers to change these to one of the approved modes. Many of these courses involve individual instruction for graduate students[[2]](#footnote-3), which can be appropriately listed as WEB if they will be completely remote because meeting times are not restricted.

Summer 2022 will be a transition in which units are encouraged to offer their distance education courses asynchronously using the WEB mode. Most of these courses were developed by or in collaboration with instructional designers to meet the Department of Education requirements for distance education (see details below). Synchronous courses for summer are permitted and should be coded as DE if not through the DLC. However, we urge caution in the use of DE courses, especially since students are already registering in the mode that is indicated in LionPATH. We also provide the following guidance and limitations.

1. There is always concern about students in other time zones because synchronous courses invite students to access the course from any time zone. Those who feel this is their only option to take the course may make poor decisions in choosing to enroll, and we ask units to be sensitive to this possibility.
2. For distance education courses, there is an additional obligation from the Department of Education on the institution to ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors. Because many courses that have been moved to synchronous distance instruction were not purposefully designed for distance delivery, it is especially important for instructors to be aware of these expectations (see details below) and develop means to ensure they are met. Note that these requirements were relaxed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Courses that typically enroll new first-year undergraduate students must be offered in person, especially courses that are part of PASSS or LEAP. The opportunity for in-person experiences while our campuses are less busy in the summer can play an important part in the successful transition of new students to Penn State.
4. Courses that typically enroll new first-year graduate students *may* be offered as DE; however, before doing so, graduate programs are strongly encouraged to think carefully about student success given the content of the course, the importance of class discussion in meeting the course learning objectives, and the requirements of the program.
5. Summer registration has already begun, so any changes to instructional modes should be carefully considered in light of the expectations of currently enrolled students. If a change is made, units are responsible for contacting enrolled students to make them aware of the change and discussing any options they have for an in-person alternative. As we emphasized for mode changes in fall and spring, this can be especially important for international students who may have requirements for in-person instruction.

Distance education courses are often very popular with students, and as appropriate, we should be providing these options to help meet their needs. With the end of work adjustment process for faculty, shifting courses to distance delivery to accommodate faculty not comfortable being in classrooms is not appropriate. Faculty members who believe they need additional accommodations to address their health needs should contact the Affirmative Action Office.

If you have questions concerning undergraduate courses, please contact Jeff Adams (jza184@psu.edu); if you have questions regarding graduate courses, please contact Michael Verderame (mxv8@psu.edu).

**Distance Education Definitions and Expectations**

**Q. How is distance education defined by Middle States Commission on Higher Education** (**MSCHE)?**

As defined by federal regulations (and therefore, MSCHE), distance education uses technology(ies) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between student and instructor, synchronously or asynchronously.

**Q. What meets the expectation of “regular interaction?”**

* providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency, prior to the student’s completion of the course or competency; and
* monitoring the student’s academic engagement and success, and ensuring an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

**Q. What meets the expectation of “substantive interaction” between students and instructors?**Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and includes at least two of the following:

* providing direct instruction;
* assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework;
* providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
* facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
* other instructional activities approved by the institutional or programmatic accrediting agency

1. DE courses have traditionally been offered only by the law schools, and they will continue to use it. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This includes courses that are by definition individual instruction, such as SUBJ 596/896 as well as some that may be offered individually (e.g., SUBJ 594). Please contact the Graduate School if you have any questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)