DISTANCE LEARNING POLICY

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Review Date: Institutional Review every after five years

Signature by Chairman Council

Table of Content

1.0   Interpretation of Operational Terms of the Policy

Distance Learning (DL) is a formal educational process where student receives instruction (contact hours) through an alternate delivery method. In DL the teacher and student, or supervisor and research student are physically in separate locations. In a DL class, the delivery of some or all of instructional content is reliant upon an alternative delivery method in addition to or in place of traditional face-to-face instruction. There is also a combination of aspects of DL and real time educational practices. This is called Flexible and Blended Learning (FBL). FBL involves a student spending a significant period of their studies away from the University undertaking a project, fieldwork or research either independently or under the auspices of another approved organization, which may be based elsewhere.

1.1   Background of MRU

Muteesa I Royal University (MRU) was offered an operational license by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2005 and started its operations in 2007. The founding Chancellor of the University, who is also its Visitor, is His Majesty the Kabaka, Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. The genesis of modern education in Uganda is historically associated with the Kingdom of Buganda owing to the role that Ssekabaka Muteesa I played in inviting the missionaries who introduced education in Uganda. Owing to this history, it is only befitting that the University was named after this visionary leader. Hence, the University was named after the 31. King of Buganda who was a monarch of great vision, Kabaka Muteesa I (1856-1884). MRU is a skills training, academic and research-oriented institution of higher learning that was established as a private institution. The initiative was promoted by the Executive Committee (EC) of the Buganda Kingdom, headed by the *Katikkiro* (i.e., Prime Minister).

1.   Strategic Goals of MRU

The Strategic Goals of MRU are as follows:

i)   To produce graduates with all-round competencies and skills to be able to initiate self-employment activities or compete for jobs in the global market;

ii)   To promote research and encourage students and staff to publish;

iii)   To build and expand collaboration and engagement with the community, the alumni, and industry and business, and to equip students with practical skills while empowering the community, industry & business to develop local solutions;

iv)   To strengthen MRU's human resource capacity;

v)   To achieve a sustainable financial resource base;

vi)   To improve the administrative and organizational arrangements of MRU with a view to achieving efficiency and effectiveness in all sections of MRU; and

vii)   To construct or acquire, rehabilitate and maintain buildings, equipment, implements, ICT facilities and land particularly for the growth and development of its niche.

1.3   Vision of MRU

The Vision of MRU is to be "a leading university responding to contemporary challenges through teaching and learning, research and technical guidance".

1.4   Mission of MRU

The Mission of MRU is "to provide training, research and technical guidance responsive to national socio–economic needs".

1.5   Core Values of MRU

The core values of MRU are as follows:

i)   Professionalism; Professionalism is a trait that's highly valued in the human resource of any organization. It has many attributes, including: (a) Specialized knowledge, (b) Competency, (c) Honesty and integrity, (d) Respect, (e) Accountability, (f) Self-regulation, and (g) Image;

ii)   Respect for Diversity;

iii)   Cultural Sensitivity;

iv)   Tenacity; and

v)   Team Spirit.

2.0 Introduction of the Policy

The policy covers educational provision leading to an award or part of an award which is delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through means which generally do not require the student to attend particular classes or events at MRU's Campuses. This includes practices such as; e-learning, distance learning, blended learning, flexible learning in which instructors-led training and web-based materials to supplement or substitute classroom-based learning are used. The policy outlines the minimum requirements that MRU expects should be met by Faculties when delivering this learning provision. The requirements of the policy are in addition to the normal expectations in the Faculties.

3.0 Objectives of the Policy

The objectives of the DL Policy are to:

i. Provide prospective students with an alternate learning delivery method; and

ii. Encourage prospective students to further their knowledge, skills and competencies to secure available job opportunities or to enhance their job status.

4.0 Application of the Policy

This Policy shall apply to Lecturers, Instructors, administrative staff and students who are affected by DL.

5.0 Governance and Curriculum

The Senate Committee is responsible for approval of Courses/Programs offered by MRU. Courses are subject to criteria established by MRU Council after receiving approval from within the sponsoring Faculty and/or Department.

The following criteria must be met before a degree program can be offered in an alternative delivery format:

i) The proposed degree or program meets demonstrable need and does not negatively impact existing undergraduate or graduate offerings of MRU;

ii)   A complete degree program is offered that enables enrolled students to graduate in a timely fashion

iii)   There are sufficient program facilities, and both Faculty and support staff, willing and able to deliver the degree program at the requisite level of quality;

iv)   The Faculty and Department involved will be able to meet their other commitments (undergraduate teaching, doctoral student training, etc.) or appropriate arrangements have been made to release the Faculty and Department from other duties;

v)   The DL degree program meets all relevant MRU degree program requirements;

vi)   The DL degree program will be comparable in quality to the on-campus version;

vii)   The integrity of the student's work and the credibility of degrees and credits are ensured; and

viii)   The program adheres to the NCHE's guidelines on distance and correspondence education.

6.0   Approval of Distance Learning Provision

i)   A taught programme or module, delivered by DL is expected to be of equal quality to any other programme or module leading to MRU award and, as part of the validation process, it must demonstrate that it shall meet students' needs effectively;

ii) Programs and modules, which are delivered by DL, are validated in the same way as any other programme or module.

6.1   Enrolment

Enrolment and re-enrolment shall be conducted by physical visit, post and/or online for DL programs, as required by the Academic Registrar. Registry shall provide tailored letters for DL students.

6.2   Induction

Students may be required to attend a formal induction at any MRU Campus. DL students are guided to online resources, if any, that induct them into DL. These resources are provided by MRU and monitored by the Office of Distance Learning (ODL) and/or the Academic Registrar's Office.

6.3 Contact Hours

It is the responsibility of the curriculum committees at Department/Faculty/Senate levels to determine the appropriate and academically justified number of Contact Hour equivalents assigned to each element of the proposed alternate delivery model.

6.4 Institutional Responsibility for Distance Learning Activities

i) The Senate: ensures that sound and acceptable practices are used for determining the amount and level of Credit awarded.

ii) The Faculties: assume primary responsibility for and, through its committees, exercise oversight of DL at MRU. The Faculty ensures the rigor of DL Courses/Programs and acts to maintain the quality of instruction. The Faculties ensure that they are appropriately trained to offer the material in approved Courses and that there are sufficient members qualified to develop, design, teach and oversee approved programs.

iii) Department and Faculty Committees: with the approval of other organs (Senate), ensure that Courses/Programs constitute coherent entities that are compatible with MRU's mission and appropriate to offer at an institution of higher education.

7.0 Distance Learning Organizational Structure

i) An ODL shall be responsible for running the DL programs. It is also responsible for providing MRU's DL students with access to distance Courses/Programs. In addition, ODL shall work with the Academic Registrar's Office to develop and maintain a mandatory online orientation process for distance students. These services are equivalent to on-Campus face-to-face assistance but can be accessed online or via e-mail and telephone.

ii) As its primary mission, ODL serves academic Departments by providing guidance and technological assistance to develop, deliver, assess, maintain, and improve DL degree and certificate programs for graduate and undergraduate students.

iii) ODL accomplishes its mission and assists faculty through a clear, well-defined organizational structure.

iv) Administratively, MRU's ODL supports the Faculty and helps realize the MRU's mission to extend education state-wide by offering Courses/Programs online and at many off-Campus sites around the country.

7.1 Process and Procedures

7.1.1 Faculties should ensure students have access to:

i) Information that sets out the respective responsibilities of the Faculty and MRU for the delivery of the programme, module, or element of study;

ii) Module descriptors, to show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of the module(s); and

iii) A clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work.

iv) Faculties should ensure that students can be confident that:

v) Study materials, whether delivered through staff of a program presenter or through web-based or other distribution channels, meet the expectations of MRU in respect of the quality of teaching and learning; and

vi) The provision is subject to Monitoring and Review in a specified period of time.

7.1.2 Students should have access to:

i) A schedule for learners' support available to them through timetabled activities, for example, tutorial sessions or web-based services;

ii) Clear and up-to-date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their program of study; and

iii) Documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of MRU for the support of a programme or element of study.

7.1.3 Students should have:

i) Identified contact, either local or remote, through email, telephone, fax or post, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression;

ii) Where appropriate, regular opportunities for inter-learner discussions about the program, both to facilitate collaborative learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the program; and

iii) Appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the program.

7.1.4 Faculties should ensure that students can be confident that:

i) Staff who provide support to learners on these programs have appropriate skills, and receive appropriate training and development; and

ii) Support for learners meets the expectations of MRU for the quality of learner support for a program of study leading to one of its awards.

7.1.6 Distance learning fees characteristics and development

Costs and Tuition Fees: Tuition fees are set by MRU's Governing Council. DL students should refer to MRU's website and Admission Office.

8.0 Quality Assurance

8.1 Role of Faculties

The Faculties shall work with the administration of MRU to establish and monitor instruction in DL Courses/Programs through ongoing assessment and evaluation. The Faculties shall regularly update courses and

programs. In this regard, DL Instructors and Teaching Assistants should be provided with:

i)   Assistance with the conversion of instructional materials to a format suitable for online delivery;

ii) Training in the use of current technology tools to enhance the online learning experience, research, development and collaboration;

iii) Information and training on intellectual property issues, copyright, and fair use of media and publications in online Courses;

iv) Grants and award opportunities to engage in developing innovative instruction and applying new technologies to their online instruction; and

v)   Quality enhancement initiatives for curriculum and teaching improvement to support successful program completion in the DL environment.

8.2   Assessment and Testing

A critical component in the on-going evaluation of the quality of DL programs is the assessment and testing of MRU's DL students and instructors. This would require that:

i)   A Unit within the Academic Registrar's Office for DL Assessment and Testing (DL/AT) Unit provides secure testing environments for DL students;

ii) DL/AT is also responsible for mentor, instructor and Course evaluations for face to-face as well as DL Courses;

iii) DL Instructors receive support for developing secure assessment strategies as part of their online Course plans; and

iv) Online and face-to-face workshops and consultations are provided for DL Instructors and Teaching Assistants.

8.3   Academic Integrity

All communications are managed through the secured learning management system, including contact with the instructor, collaboration with peers, submission of assignments, and accessing grades. Instructors who teach DL Courses and who use high-stakes examinations to test students' knowledge and skills partner with the ODL's Assessment & Testing Unit for coordination.

8.4 Reporting and Auditing

ODL is responsible for maintaining aggregate data and responding to information requests from numerous internal and external entities. In cooperation with the Academic Registrar's Office, ODL creates reports regarding DL retention rates, Course sections, student enrollments and trends.

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