

Distance Learning Student Handbook



University of
Connecticut

Institute for Teaching
and Learning

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1. What to Expect

What It Is

Distance learning is a teaching situation where the instructor and the students, separated by a physical distance, are brought together via technology. At UConn, distance learning refers specifically to courses taught using a videoconference (interactive television) system. Videoconference technology enables the students and the instructor to see and hear each other at the same time. In this way, it is almost as if they are in the same physical classroom.

How It Works

During a distance class, everything the instructor says and does is transmitted to the remote campus by cameras and microphones located in the classroom. The students at the remote site see and hear the instructor on a TV or projection screen. Likewise, the same technology is located in each remote site so the instructor can hear and view the students on monitors located at the back of the classroom. Whatever image is displayed on the TV or projection screen in the classroom can be transmitted to the remote site as well, so all students will see the same thing at the same time.

WebCT Vista

Although students “attend” lectures using the videoconference system, many instructors use WebCT Vista for submitting assignments, working on group projects, and having out-of-class discussions. Vista is basically a private website for a course. For help learning to use Vista, contact the Learning Resource Center (see section 7 for details).

2. Communicating with Your Instructor

Making a Personal Connection

A common frustration expressed by students enrolled in distance learning classes is the lack of a personal connection with the instructor and with the students at the other campuses. Here are some strategies for addressing this issue:

- Try to attend the first class session at the originating campus. This affords the opportunity for everyone to meet each other and make personal connections.
- Ask your instructor to teach from your campus periodically.
- See if your instructor will visit your campus outside of class at regular intervals to meet with students face-to-face.

Communication Tools

There are a number of ways to contact your instructor outside of class. In addition to calling during office hours or sending an email using HuskyMail, Vista provides several different tools for communicating with your instructor and other students in your class:

- Email: This feature can be used both for communication and for submitting homework. Messages sent and received using the Vista email tool are stored in Vista, not HuskyMail, making it easy to keep track of class-related emails.
- Discussion Board: The discussion board can also be used for submitting homework and for communication. Students can also share files, making it easy to work on group projects.
- Live Chat: This tool allows students to “talk” online with the instructor in real time.

3. Homework and Exams

Homework

Homework assignments are normally posted on Vista or handed out by a proctor. Instructors will specify whether completed assignments should be given to the proctor, emailed, or posted in Vista. If you have difficulty emailing or posting on Vista, notify your instructor immediately. Technical problems may not excuse late work.

Exams

Most distance learning courses give exams on paper rather than electronically in Vista. All exams are proctored. Instructors will specify if they require students to come to the originating campus to take an exam. Arrangements can sometimes be made for students at remote sites to have exams proctored at their own campus – check with the instructor in advance.

4. Absences and Cancelled Classes

Missing Class

If a student misses a class, there will not be an opportunity to make up the session. Classes are not recorded so taped lectures are not available.

Cancelled Classes and Campus Closings

If an instructor cancels class or the originating campus is closed due to inclement weather, a note will be placed on the classroom door at all remote sites to notify students of the cancellation. If a remote site is closed but class will still be held at the originating site, the class will be recorded and a videotape made available to remote site students within a few days.

5. Be Seen and Heard

How to Listen and Speak

One of the most critical aspects of distance learning is making sure everyone can understand what the instructor says. The classroom microphones are very sensitive, which means they may pick up other noises in the room (e.g. the air conditioner or rustling papers) that could make it difficult for remote site students to hear the instructor or vice versa. In order to hear the lecture clearly and make sure the instructor can hear your questions, be sure to:

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Pause briefly between questions.
- Avoid wearing noisy jewelry – you would be surprised how loud a few bracelets can sound rattling against a desk.
- Avoid whispering to other students while the instructor is talking.

Where to Sit

Distance learning classrooms have one or two cameras at the front of the room, facing the students. This setup means the instructor can see all students in the room, while having the best view of those seated in the front and center of the room. Students who want to ask questions or make comments are more likely to be noticed if they sit in these sections.

6. How to Be Successful

Success in a distance learning course depends on several important factors.¹ When asked what it takes to be successful, students taking distance learning courses have identified the following steps:

Start right away

Understand your course requirements

Communicate with your instructor

Check (and follow!) course deadlines

Expect to succeed

Seek help when you have questions

Stop procrastinating



¹ Adapted from *Student Handbook for Videoconference Courses*. Technical Applications Center, Northern Virginia Community College. July 1999, pg. 3.

7. Student Services

Learning Resource Center

The Learning Resource Center (LRC) provides student support for WebCT Vista, E-portfolio, and the new Computer Technology Competency general education requirement.

Location: First Floor of Homer Babbidge Library (HBL)
Hours: 8:30 am to 4:00 pm
Phone: (860) 486-1187
<http://www.lrc.uconn.edu/>

Services for Students with Disabilities

There are two primary resources at the Storrs campus for students with disabilities. For those having a documented learning disability, services may be available through the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) as well as the University Program for College Students with Learning Disabilities (UPLD).

- UPLD: University Program for College Students with Learning Disabilities
Location: Gentry Building (Neag School of Education), Room 003
Phone: (860) 486-0178
<http://www.education.uconn.edu/departments/epsy/upld/>
- CSD: Center for Students with Disabilities
Location: Wilbur Cross Building 201
Phone: (860) 486-2020 (voice)
(860) 486-2077 (TDD)
<http://www.csd.uconn.edu/>

Bookstores

The UConn Co-op serves as the official bookstore for the University of Connecticut. In addition to textbooks and course materials, the Co-op offers general books, computers and software, school supplies, art & engineering supplies, UConn apparel & memorabilia, greeting cards, gifts, snacks, health & beauty aids, and much more.

- Storrs
Location: Corner of Hillside Road and Stadium Road
Hours: Monday - Thursday 8:00am-8:00pm
Friday 8:00am-6:00pm
Saturday 10:00am-6:00pm
Sunday 12:00noon-6:00pm
Phone: (860) 486-3537
<http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/>
- Regional and Professional Campuses
Avery Point: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/avrypt.html>
Hartford: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/hartford.html>
Stamford: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/stamford.html>
Storrs: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/>
Torrington: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/tringtn.html>
Waterbury: <http://www.bookstore.uconn.edu/hillside.html>

Open Computer Labs

Computer Homework Labs have individual student PC and/or Macintosh computer stations. The number and kind of computers available, open hours, consulting help available, and restrictions on usage vary. Check the individual labs for this specific information.

<http://software.uconn.edu/complabs.php>

Counseling and Mental Health Services

Counseling & Mental Health Services offers University of Connecticut students (Storrs campus) an opportunity to discuss whatever personal concerns they might have, in a confidential and non-judgmental setting.

Location: Student Health Services Building, 234 Glenbrook Road

Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

After 4:30 pm on weekdays and from 8 am to 4 pm on weekends, call (860) 486-3427

After 4 pm on weekends, call 1-800-591-3878

Phone: (860) 486-4705

<http://www.smhs.uconn.edu/>

Libraries

Information about library resources, hours, and policies, including links to the regional campus and the UConn School of Law and Health Center libraries, is available online at <http://www.lib.uconn.edu>.

- Storrs Campus Libraries
Circulation Services: 486-2518
Information: 486-4636
Interlibrary Loan: 486-4959
Reference Desk: 486-2513
Research & Information Services: 486-2514
Reserve Services: 486-2307
- Regional Campus Libraries
Avery Point: 860-405-9146
Stamford: 203-251-8500
Torrington: 860-626-6820
Waterbury: 203-236-9900
West Hartford: 860-570-9028

Tutoring

The University of Connecticut and its schools and colleges coordinate many types of tutoring for students. Some areas of study have dedicated tutoring centers available while others set aside hours for tutoring of all kinds.

<http://www.uconnconnects.uconn.edu/UCTUTORS.html>

8. Glossary

Asynchronous: Communication that occurs at different times, e.g. email.

Call: The connection between all sites participating in a distance learning course, similar to a conference call. There are two kinds of calls – point-to-point and multipoint (or bridge).

Distance Learning: An instructional situation where the participants (instructor and students) are separated by a physical distance. At UConn, distance learning refers specifically to courses taught via teleconference (other schools may include online courses in their definition).

Local Students: Students participating in the course at the local site (students physically in the same room as the instructor).

Local Site: The campus from where the instructor is physically teaching.

Originating Site: See Local Site.

Proctor: Similar to a teaching assistant (TA). Proctors operate the videoconference technology, distribute and collect homework assignments, and monitor exams.

Remote Site: The campus or campuses, other than the local site, that participate in the course via teleconference (the campus from where the instructor is not physically teaching).

Remote Students: Students participating in the course from a remote site (students who are not physically in the room with the instructor).

Regional Campus: One of the five UConn campuses other than Storrs. In this handbook, it refers to the campus the instructor is not physically teaching at. If the instructor physically teaches at Storrs and connects to students at Waterbury, then Waterbury is the regional campus. If the instructor physically teaches at Avery Point and connects to students at Hartford, then Hartford is the regional campus.

Site: A campus or other location where an instructor or a group of students is physically located.

Source: A piece of instructional equipment, e.g. document camera, PC, DVD, etc. When selecting a source to send to the regional site, you are telling the teleconference system which piece of equipment you want to use.

Synchronous: Simultaneous communication (also called real time), e.g. a telephone conversation.

Teleconference (Videoconference): Communication across a distance with video and audio. Students are required to report to their local campus during scheduled meeting times to participate in the course using audio and video technology.