

# Distance (Online) Learning at USFSP

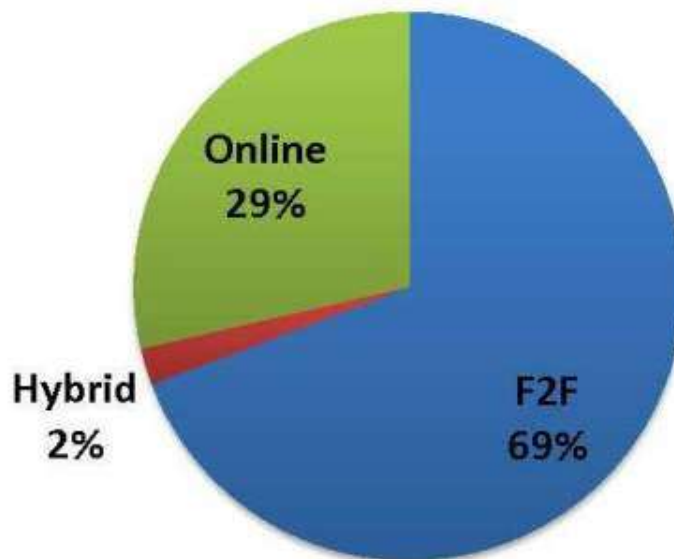
Posted on [March 24, 2015](#) by [Carol Hixson](#)

<https://poynterdean.wordpress.com/2015/03/24/distance-learning-at-usfsp/>

*Note from March 2021: in the intervening years, web sites and other portals have changed. Some of the links in the posting below no longer function. Please search the [USFSP Library](#) and [USFSP](#) web sites for current links.*

USF St. Petersburg offers courses that are fully online, hybrid (a mixture of online and face-to-face), and entirely face-to-face in a traditional classroom. The determination of whether a course is online, hybrid, or face-to-face is made in accordance with guidelines established by the State of Florida. According to the State guidelines, an online course is one where “at least 80% of the direct instruction is delivered using some form of technology when the student and instructor are separated by time or space, or both (per section 1009.24(17), Florida Statutes (F.S.))” For the past five or six years, the percentage of student credit hours (SCH) for online courses at USFSP has remained fairly constant – right around 30% of the total SCH. In the spring 2015 semester, the breakdown of SCH at USFSP looked like this:

## Student Credit Hours by Format Spring 2015



with 29% of student credit hours being from online courses, 69% being from face-to-face (F2F) courses, and 2% being hybrid – according to the State definitions. The Florida Legislature authorized a distance learning fee in 2008 for state universities and community colleges. The amount of that fee was left to individual institutions to determine, as long as the fee did not exceed the additional costs of developing and offering online courses. The USF System, of which USFSP is a part, has set the fee for online courses at \$50 a credit hour. The State has set guidelines for how the Distance Learning (DL) fee may be used, which can be found by reviewing the [Florida Distance Learning Task Force Final Report](#). In general, permissible expenses are those “that represent the additional costs associated with developing and delivering distance learning courses ... [and] may include:

- specialized technology and maintenance (e.g., hardware, software licenses; technology consulting; hosting and network services)
- development and/or acquisition (licensing) of instructional content for distance learning courses
- distance learning program development and accreditation

- distance learning program quality assessment and control
- faculty development and support for distance learning courses
- distance learning student support services
- testing facilities and support
- distance learning administrative & operating costs
- course management system server, database, and support staff
- instructional material

So, how has the DL fee been used to support distance education at USFSP? The money has been used in all of the ways that the State has indicated are permissible expenses. Specifically, the fees support:

- instructional designers working with faculty in all the Colleges to design high quality online courses;
- student assistants to help faculty provide a high level of interaction with students in a class and ensure that the class is operating smoothly;
- an extensive [program of training and professional development](#) for staff and faculty so that they can continue to deliver the best courses and take good advantage of the latest and most appropriate technology;
- the development of a [portal for all student services](#) focused on online learners;
- [captioning](#) to enable students with hearing disabilities to take full advantage of online courses;
- membership and certification offered through the prestigious and internationally recognized [Quality Matters](#) organization to provide assurance that USFSP courses and instructors are meeting the best standards for online learning
- the upgrade of the Distance Learning Studio where classes are videotaped and digitized for online courses and the purchase of a wide range of specialized equipment and software across the campus;
- and much more.

The use of the DL fee at USFSP is governed by policies and procedures established and reviewed by the Regional Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the four Deans of the University. This effort is also overseen by the [Distance Learning Steering Committee](#), which has administrative and faculty representation from all the Colleges, the Library, Student Affairs, Graduate Studies, Faculty Senate, and Student Government. There is currently a vacancy in the position of Director of Distance Learning at USFSP and I as Library Dean have been filling in that role, in addition to my other responsibilities. We have made a great deal of progress in the past few years but there is still much work to be done. The Library offers a wide range of services to support students and faculty engaged in online learning at USFSP, some of which are detailed on our [web site](#). I invite students and faculty to contact me if they have any questions or concerns.