

# **UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH MBARARA (USJM)**



## **E-LEARNING POLICY**

**JANUARY, 2023**

## FOREWORD

The use of Technology to facilitate learning today cannot be over emphasized. E-Learning is now the new reality that Universities and other Institutions of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must adopt in order to reach a wider audience.

University of Saint Joseph Mbarara (USJM) is ready to move with times in order to provide more convenient teaching and learning, research and innovation, as well as community engagement. This can only be achieved through digital main streaming.

The Policy on E-Learning is to meant to define parameters and guide both students and staff on usage of computer technologies to facilitate and optimize learning at USJM.

The Policy has been developed in consultative process with involvement of various stakeholders. It is responsible to the increasing demand for eLearning services at USJM and we hope it shall address all the queries raised in that respect.

It shall continue to be improved and we call upon all the stakeholders to keep giving feedback for that purpose.

We wish you the best.

**VICE CHANCELLOR**

**University of Saint Joseph Mbarara (USJM)**

# Table of Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	2
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	4
<b>1.1 E-Learning Goals</b> .....	6
<b>1.2 E-Learning Mission</b> .....	7
<b>1.3 Objectives</b> .....	7
<b>1.4 Purpose</b> .....	8
<b>1.5 Guiding Best Practices for the implementation of the Policy</b> .....	8
<b>2.0 Detailed USJM eLearning Policy and guidelines</b> .....	9
<b>2.1 Institutional Policy and eLearning</b> .....	9
<b>2.2 Curricula and Instruction for Online Courses</b> .....	11
<b>2.3. Faculty Staff Members Teaching Online Courses</b> .....	14
<b>2.4. Student Support Services for eLearning</b> .....	16
<b>2.5. ELearning Facilities and Support Services</b> .....	18
<b>2.6. Planning and Evaluation for Online Courses</b> .....	19
<b>3.0 Policy Implementation Committee</b> .....	20
<b>3.1 E-learning policy implementation advisory Committee</b> .....	20
<b>3.1.1 Terms of Reference</b> .....	20
<b>3.1.2 Membership</b> .....	20
<b>3.2 Terms of Reference for the Senate sub-committee review     committee</b> .....	20

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Archdiocese of Mbarara (AoM) started a university as part of its mission and mandate to establish educational institutions of different levels to share in the salvific ministry of Christ by being the salt and light to the world. The founders coined the name: University of Saint Joseph Mbarara (USJM), for the university from St. Joseph, foster father to Jesus and the patron Saint of the pioneer St. Joseph Technical School, whose tradition of hard workmanship and community responsive education, USJM is to uphold.

The personal qualities and values of St. Joseph, the worker, such as integrity, hardworking, commitment, are behind this tradition, and the University will uphold them. USJM aims at total orientation and focus on tertiary education that meets community needs and engineers' socioeconomic transformation. It delivers relevant, affordable, high quality, inclusive and community-responsive university education. The University of Saint Joseph Mbarara derives its vision and mission from the Christian understanding of the integral growth of a person.

- i. **Vision:** A leading center for integrated community responsive university education.
- ii. **Mission:** To provide holistic education for sustainable development.
- iii. **Motto:** Foster Excellence and Integrity (*Praestantia et Integritate Foveat*)
- iv. **Slogan:** For and With the Community
- v. **Philosophy:** Community-Responsive and Engaged university education

vi. **Core Values**

- a. God fearing,
- b. Integrity,
- c. Excellence,
- d. Accountability,
- e. Community responsiveness

vii. **Objectives:**

- a. To provide relevant university education.
- b. To promote research and innovation among stakeholders.
- c. To nurture citizens of integrity and sense of common good.
- d. To nurture students with demand-oriented skills.
- e. To promote best practices in institutional governance.
- f. To promote pastoral mission of the church

It is USJM commitment to encourage the development of each individual through education at all levels, stressing in particular the creation/promotion of an environment where intellectual and moral values are priorities. Since the person is at the center of all growth and development, both at individual and societal levels, all members of the community respect each other in an attempt to create an environment of openness and trust. The University is committed to promoting justice, respect, solidarity, human rights,

equality, and environmental protection, both in its own community and society in general.

This policy shall apply to all matriculated e-Learning courses and degree/certificate programs offered by University of Saint Joseph Mbarara (USJM). It is not the intent of this policy to supplant any existing policies set forth by the University, but where necessary, to define new or to expand existing policies and procedures to ensure the most effective implementation and support of e-Learning courses and programs.

E-Learning is defined as a formal educational process in which instruction takes place in its entirety or partially through computer-mediated communications, when the lecturer and students are not in the same place at the same time. Instead, the interaction between the lecturer and students is mediated using digital text, audio, video, and/or other interactive computer technologies.

E-Learning courses typically use a variety of technologies to deliver instruction and engage students. These technologies and their respective pedagogical approaches continue to evolve, and this policy allows the University to meet the demands of student expectations as well as continue to provide broad based high-quality educational opportunity to all her students.

### **1.1 E-Learning Goals**

USJM's E-Learning goal is to expand access to higher education opportunities for individual and community members of the nation and others through electronically offered classes. Distance learning and online teaching technology shall be used to provide relevant and timely coursework, information, and training to enhance the learning experience by removing the barriers of both time and place.

## **1.2 E-Learning Mission**

The mission of the E-Learning Unit at USJM is to provide quality instruction through electronic-based accredited courses to enable students to attain their educational goals. The E-Learning Unit is committed to student success by supporting efforts to ensure that quality online education and support services are available to learners through a variety of technology resources. The unit shall extend the offerings of USJM courses to the community and beyond through E-Learning.

## **1.3 Objectives**

1. Support and encourage the internal development of the e-learning programme by promoting and providing guidelines for training, inclusion of e-learning courses in faculty workloads, and technical support.
2. Provide informational resources and support services for students enrolled in online courses.
3. Identify and address staff and student needs in teaching and learning online.
4. Encourage and support the use of the Learning Management System (LMS) and other technologies, in both face-to-face and online learning environments.
5. Encourage the sharing of effective technology-enhanced teaching and learning practices among staff.
6. To identify, provide, expand, and coordinate the development of quality courses and programs to meet the needs of e-learners.
7. Increase education access to more students who live in remote areas who attend USJM courses using E-Learning tools, to complete degree programs and/or start their higher education experience.
8. Achieve accreditation for degrees offered online through USJM's LMS.

## 1.4 Purpose

The policy is to provide improved access to education at USJM by providing courses in various non-traditional ways to meet the needs of students who cannot attend regular day and weekend classes and to enhance the course offerings to our traditional students. The purpose of online classes is offered as an option to coming to campus. The self-paced nature of online courses allows students to fit the work time into their schedule.

## 1.5 Guiding Best Practices for the implementation of the Policy

USJM shall incorporate the following E-Learning best practices features, as identified in the CSU Online Learning White Paper (adapted from CSU-OLWP 2012: 4, 28)

1. **Creation of a student-centered learning environment by providing essential information in static form** addresses the need for a detailed syllabus including student support services, technical training, equipment needs, and explicit communication on course expectations as components of student-centered learning.
2. **Creation of an active and engaging learning environment with dynamic activities** is facilitated to promote interactions and engagement through what is identified as social, teaching, and content presence as well as the creation of online courses.
3. **Active presence in the course** enhances online education through staff interactions with students and the maintenance of a constant presence in online active presence can be achieved through the use of text-based technologies like forums, wikis, and instant messaging technologies or media rich applications like video-conferencing technologies.

4. **Prompt response to student inquiries** is identified as especially important in online courses, with staff advised to post response times for students both during the week days as well as on weekend.
5. **Promotion of student learning success through course organization and feedback** requires online courses that are well organized, easy for students to navigate, are predictable, and provide ongoing student evaluation.
6. **Communication that is clear, polite, and wide** describes the importance of polite, precise, careful, constructive, and widely disseminated information through online learning.
7. **Quality assurance** is a best practice that needs to be started prior to initiation of the course and maintained throughout the course through the use of student evaluations and comments regarding online experiences. Like all courses, e-Learning modalities shall align with course objectives specified in the course approval process. Demonstration of teaching effectiveness shall be consistent with the University and Quality Assurance guidelines.

## **2.0 Detailed USJM eLearning Policy and guidelines**

### **2.1 Institutional Policy and eLearning**

- A. **Purpose:** The purpose of the USJM eLearning Policy and procedures is to assure high quality in the delivery of eLearning with regard to instruction and learning. With an effective eLearning Policy and procedures, students shall be provided the knowledge needed to achieve their professional and career goals in a student-centered learning environment. Staff members shall be provided

with the guidelines, which govern the teaching, learning, and support services for eLearning.

- B. Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs:** eLearning activities shall comply with the underlying principles of Quality Assurance and shall be aligned with the standards set forth by the accrediting body; the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). The courses that are offered via eLearning shall meet the same quality standards as those that apply to campus-based instruction. Elements of single courses or programs shall be designed to address the specific needs of distance learners who are likely to enroll.
- C. Definition:** For purposes of this policy, E-Learning is defined as a formal educational process in which instruction takes place in its entirety or partially through computer-mediated communications, when the lecturer and students are not in the same place at the same time. Instead, the interaction between the lecturer and students is mediated using digital text, audio, video, and/or other interactive computer technologies. All this taking place on the USJM Learning Management System (LMS).
- D. Review of eLearning Policy:** The initial approval of the eLearning Policy shall follow the University procedures for approving policies. The ongoing responsibility for evaluating and recommending revisions to the eLearning Policy resides with the USJM Senate Sub-Committee, which is composed of Academic registrar and faculty Deans.
- E. Academic Integrity of eLearning Courses:** eLearning courses are comparable to campus-based courses in terms of: (1) syllabi, (2) textbooks, (3) grades, (4) methods of evaluation, and (5) expected learning outcomes. Online courses shall be subjected to the same policies as stated in

the University Academic Handbook for campus-based courses.

- F. Oversight of Courses:** eLearning at USJM shall operate under the purview of the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The Senate Sub-Committee shall review all courses to be offered at USJM. eLearning shall adhere to the USJM University Rules and Regulations that all courses of the same prefix and number are equivalent, regardless of mode of delivery.

## **2.2 Curricula and Instruction for Online Courses**

- A. Definition of Online Course:** An online course is defined as a course in which 80% or more of the course is conducted online as published in the course syllabus. The determination of whether a course meets this definition is made by the Head of Department.
- B. Converting an Existing Course to an Online Course:** The process for converting an existing course to an online course shall be as follows:
- i. The staff member shall convert the course following USJM's guidelines for online courses and construct the course within the USJM eLearning guidelines. Staff members are required to meet departmental standards using the procedures and policies developed by the department. It shall be recommended that staff members work with the University's Quality Assurance Directorate throughout the development process to ensure the course meets the University's and appropriate accreditation standards for online courses.
  - ii. The Quality Assurance Directorate shall evaluate the online course for the required standards as recommended in the Quality

Assurance policy/framework and notify the staff member, the appropriate department Head and the Dean, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs when all the online course design criteria have been met. If the course does not meet USJM's online course standards and is not aligned with the underlying principles and standards of Quality Assurance, the proposal may be returned to the faculty member with recommendations for changes.

- iii. All online courses shall meet requirements established by this policy, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and other accrediting bodies.

**C. Designing a New Course for the Online Program:** If a Faculty desires to design a new course specifically as an online course, the course shall first be approved. Once approved, the online course shall follow the same process as converting an existing course (as indicated in **Section 2, B** above).

**D. Course Review:** The responsibility for ongoing assessment of online courses shall rest with the appropriate department, Head of Department and Faculty Deans. The Faculty Deans, and Heads of Departments shall work with the Quality Assurance Directorate in assessing course quality based on the Quality Assurance policy/ framework and/or any other appropriate assessment tools.

**E. Staff Member Interaction with Online Students:** Communication shall be essential to the success of all courses. Specific requirements for planned interaction and timely feedback between students and staff shall be detailed in the online course materials (course outlines) which shall be accessible through the individual lecturers.

Methods of interaction may include email, phone, fax, chat, discussion dashboards, or audio/video conferencing.

- F. **Staff Member Responsibilities:** The staff member shall be responsible for the course content, delivery of instruction, evaluation of student progress in online learning courses, and timely communication with students. The staff member shall evaluate course content on a continuing basis to ensure currency of materials.
- G. **Accessibility:** As with campus-based courses, students taking eLearning courses may request physical presence to meet individual needs of the learner with a documented disability. Special arrangements may be made to deliver the online course in an alternative format as needed to meet the student's accessibility needs. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the University Academic Registrar through the Head of Department and Faculty Dean prior to the start of class to request for such arrangements.
- H. **Intellectual Property and Third Party Providers:** Online learning courses are frequently designed and disseminated by other colleges, universities, corporations, or non-profit organizations. In the event that USJM wishes to purchase or lease modules or entire courses from a third party, such courses or modules shall be evaluated by the appropriate department, Faculty and the Quality Assurance Directorate to ensure alignment with the departmental, Faculty and Quality Assurance standards.
- I. **University Academic Ethics:** The USJM Student Academic Handbook Section 4.10.1, subsection (f) states that it is the responsibility of each student to be familiar with the Code of Conduct and policies concerning academic honesty. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aiding and abetting

dishonesty, collusion, and unauthorized possession or distribution of academic materials. Plagiarism software may be utilized by faculty staff and students to evaluate submitted assignments for illegal use and poor scholarship. The conduct code and University judicial procedures shall be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

- J. **Copyright Compliance:** Staff and students shall be required and expected to understand and adhere to the copyright law of Uganda. Copyright law shall be followed when performances, displays, copies or other reproductions of copyrighted material are made available to students. This shall include the posting of copyrighted material in the USJM eLearning platform or other online sites.

### **2.3. Faculty Staff Members Teaching Online Courses**

- A. **Faculty Qualifications:** Staff members who teach online courses shall meet the same qualifications as outlined in chapter three (employment procedures) of the University Human Resource Manual. Part-time academic staff members shall be held to the same standards as full-time staff members.
- B. **Faculty Staff Training:** USJM shall provide a variety of training workshops and individual training for staff members in the use of the USJM LMS and other technologies used in eLearning. Faculties shall work cooperatively with the Directorate of Quality Assurance to ensure the delivery of quality online courses. Before teaching online, staff members shall complete an orientation workshop conducted by the University or provide evidence of prior professional development

and/or effective teaching experience as related to online pedagogy.

- C. **Staff Evaluation:** Academic staff members teaching online courses shall be evaluated in a comparable manner as those who teach campus-based courses. Anonymous student evaluations shall be completed in all online courses. The results shall be used to guide course revisions and shall be available to the staff member and department head.
- D. **Staff Teaching Load:** Academic staff members teaching online courses shall receive the same credit towards their teaching load as do staff members who teach campus-based courses. The decision as to how many online courses a staff member may teach shall be left to the discretion of the Head of Department and relevant university academic leadership authorities.
- E. **Staff Compensation:** Academic staff members teaching online courses shall not be guaranteed compensation for developing and/or teaching online courses. Academic departments may, however, offer incentives for staff to develop and/or teach online classes.
- F. **Staff Operational Hours:** Both full-time and part-time academic staff members teaching online courses shall maintain the minimum hours per week as indicated in section 3.3 of the University Human Resource Manual. Special considerations shall however, be subject to the approval of the Head of Department, Dean, and Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs.
- G. **Faculty Staff Users Group:** In addition to staff training and professional development related to teaching in eLearning formats, academic staff members shall meet periodically to share information and discuss ideas to enhance effectiveness of courses and quality of courses being taught.

- H. **Staff Support and Supervision:** Full-time and part-time online academic staff members will be supervised as a regular activity of the department head. Online courses and programs shall be integrated into an appropriate management framework within the University.

#### 2.4. Student Support Services for eLearning

- A. **Student Readiness:** Students shall need to be proficient in the following skills in order to be successful in an online class: time management, academic performance, self-motivation, reading ability, and computer skills. Tutoring will provide them with instructions on how to navigate through the LMS. A self-assessment tool will assist students to determine if they can succeed in an eLearning class.
- B. **Student Services:** Online students shall apply for admission, register for classes, and check course availability online, as do traditional students. Information will be available online through the University Website. Students shall be required to consult an advisor before registering for online classes. Advising services for students shall be available through faculties in the individual departments. Online advising will also be available to students through the Academic Registrar's Department.
- C. **Registration:** All registrations for online classes may be completed via e-mail or by physically accessing the USJM Academic Registrar's office.
- D. **Student Activities:** The Office of Students Guild serves as liaisons between the faculties, administration and the student body and assists with all student activities. Information concerning student activities and

clubs/organizations shall be available online for both eLearning students and traditional students.

- E. **Student Complaints/Grievance Procedure:** Any student who wishes to make a formal complaint to the University shall refer to the procedures stipulated in the USJM Student Academic Handbook Section 4.10.1, subsection (i), which is available online on the university website.
- F. **Student Identification:** As a MUST, all students enrolled at USJM shall be required to have a valid student ID. Online student who would want to physically come and utilize campus services shall acquire a valid student ID prior to access. Similarly, any special online services requests shall be validated and verified through submission of the students' valid ID card number.
- G. **Marketing of Online Programs:** Advertising, recruiting, and admissions information representing current online courses, requirements, and services shall be available to students. All USJM courses will be advertised online and in print each academic year.
- H. **Library Resources:** The University shall ensure that students participating in eLearning courses have access to adequate and appropriate learning resources. Students shall have access to the physical Library and also the virtual library resources within USJM with use of a current USJM student ID. Library services available to distance students shall be accessed through the online library catalog, electronic books, online databases, full-text journals available online, research assistance, and inter-library loan.

## **2.5. ELearning Facilities and Support Services**

- A. ELearning Equipment and Facilities:** USJM shall provide the necessary equipment and facilities to effectively deliver synchronous courses at a distance. Computers with Internet access are available on campus for students who may need to use campus facilities for eLearning purposes. All courses that require laboratories and site visits, which cannot be completed via technology-based eLearning, shall be handled with special arrangements made by the staff member and the department Head.
- B. Funding for eLearning:** Sufficient funds for the operation of eLearning programs shall be allocated annually to maintain instructional offerings. The annual University budget shall provide for the maintenance of equipment and networks.
- C. eLearning Tuition and Fees:** Tuition and fees for online classes shall be the same as on-campus, based on the student's residency status. The Late Registration Fee shall apply based on the published registration schedule.
- D. Institutional Technology and Responsibility:** The LMS Administrator, the ICT Services Unit and Quality Assurance Directorate shall provide the technical expertise necessary to maintain connectivity and to address students and staff concerns with the technical issues of eLearning. A fulltime ICT Helpdesk shall be available for staff and students. In addition, the Quality Assurance Directorate shall provide training of staff member and students. The Directorate shall also continuously schedule several training modules for professional development during each year and also offer self-paced online training. Department heads may request additional training for staff members on an as-needed basis.

## 2.6. Planning and Evaluation for Online Courses

- A. **Institutional Planning:** Online learning is planned to meet the University mission, strategic initiatives, goals and objectives, and is consistent with the USJM Strategic Plan. Online learning is designed and evaluated according to the same guidelines used for on-campus programs. The effectiveness of online learning is assessed as discussed in this document. Finally, the results of the assessment shall be used to make appropriate changes to the strategic plan and to the specific programs.
- B. **Educational Effectiveness:** The Quality Assurance Directorate shall provide reports of educational effectiveness of online learning to ensure comparability to campus-based programs. This shall include anonymous assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction. USJM shall collect survey data each year for individual courses, staff members, and for students. This information shall be used to make recommendations for course revisions and to better serve the students.

The University shall assess student capability to succeed in online learning programs through a web-based self-assessment instrument and use the information in advising the student. If the student does not possess the necessary skills, the student shall be referred to an advisor to discuss the skills needed to succeed in eLearning. All staff members shall have to provide syllabi and necessary course information for eLearning courses. A common syllabus shall be used for each particular course. Syllabi reflect course goals, the course requirements, and the expected outcomes, which refer to course goals, in addition to any on-campus requirements.

### **3.0 Policy Implementation Committee**

There shall be a committee to oversee the implementation of the e-Learning policy and shall report to Senate and other relevant University bodies. The committee shall oversee the development of an evaluation plan to assess the impact of the policy. Central to this shall be a commitment to include feedback from students and staff on all aspects of e-learning.

### **3.1 E-learning policy implementation advisory Committee**

#### **3.1.1 Terms of Reference**

1. Represent Faculties' strategies and priorities in relation to the implementation of e-Learning Policy
2. Advise on the priority and nature of eLearning Policy implementation activities
3. Promote and disseminate eLearning Policy implementation
4. Advise on the ongoing development of University eLearning Policy

#### **3.1.2 Membership**

Representatives from the following areas of the University

- DVC Academic Affairs (chairperson)
- Faculty Deans
- Student Guild Office
- IT office

### **3.2 Terms of Reference for the Senate sub-committee review committee**

1. Consider the recommendations of the eLearning Policy Implementation Advisory group with respect to approval.
2. Make recommendations on the prioritization and implementation of approved developments.

3. Consider and assess University Plans and make recommendations for the consideration of the eLearning Policy Implementation Advisory Group with respect to the eLearning Policy development or implementation.
4. Consider eLearning Policy developments in progression for ratification by Senate.

#### **4.0 Amendment of the Manual**

The Manual, subject to amendment from time to time by relevant authority, was approved by the University of Saint Joseph Mbarara Governing Council on this..... day of

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**Rev Fr Gervase Nsekanimanya Diido**

**CHAIRMAN**



**Rev Fr Dr Deus M Karemiri (PhD)**

**VICE CHANCELLOR**