



Policy AC044: Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education

Recommended for Approval by:

A blue ink signature of Dr. Scott E. Miller, written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Scott E. Miller, VP for Academic Affairs and Provost,
Pennsylvania Western University

Approved by:

A blue ink signature of Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, President,
Pennsylvania Western University

Effective Date: 07/01/2022

A. Intent

To define how student identity is verified when students engage in distance education courses at Pennsylvania Western University.

B. Definition(s)

Not Applicable.

C. Policy

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) requires that institutions offering distance education or correspondence courses or programs have processes in place to ensure that the student registering for a course is the same student who participates in the course or receives course credit.

The Act requires that institutions use one of the following three methods to verify student identity:

- A secure login and pass code;
- Proctored examinations;
- New or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

Pennsylvania Western University meets these requirements by assigning a secure username and password that is unique to each student. Students must use their secure username and password to access the University's learning management system, D2L, through which online courses are taught. The username and password are also required for students to access their academic records through the student information system. All new students at the undergraduate and graduate levels receive an email from the Admissions Office with their assigned university email address and instructions on how to establish their own secure password following guidelines defined by the Information Technology Office at PennWest.

Personally identifiable information collected by the University may be used, at the discretion of the institution, as the basis for identity verification. For instance, a student requesting that their password be reset may be asked to provide multiple examples of information for comparison with data on file.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs student records access and underpins the University's Confidentiality of Student Records Policy (AC053). This policy defines the effective safeguards for privacy of student records at the University. Access to student records via the University's student information system is controlled and reviewed periodically for appropriateness. The Registrar, as the student records custodian for the University, reviews requests for access and weighs the "educational need to know" in all situations when granting access to student records. The Registrar provides regular information regarding FERPA across the University each year to ensure that all employees are aware of the laws governing access to, and the release of, student information.

Failure to read university policies, guidelines, requirements and regulations will not exempt users from responsibility.

D. Procedure(s)

Not Applicable.

E. Related policies

Confidentiality of Student Records (AC053)

Name Change (AC055)

Proctoring for Distance Education Courses (AC058)

Student Personal Information Verification (AC054)

F. Contact Information

For additional information, please contact the Office of the Registrar.

G. Policy Review Schedule

All policies will be reviewed every two years or on an as needed basis if a change in BOG, PASSHE or Pennsylvania law would create the need for an immediate change.