



# CEST

Centro de Estudos Sociedade e Tecnologia



Universidade de São Paulo

Bulletin - Volume 3, Number 7, September/2018

## Recommendations for teachers and students on blended and distance learning formats in higher education

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Before making any further considerations regarding Distance Education (DE), it is important to note that a fundamental moment for this educational model in higher education in the countryside is on its way. This is due to Decree No 9,057, of May 25, 2017, Chapter III, Art. 11, § 2, which provides that accreditation of higher education institutions in distance model is granted only for undergraduate and graduate **latu sensu** programs.

In this the current year 2018, the Coordination of Personal Improvement in Higher Education (CAPES) is contacting a working group composed of eight institutions related to higher education to discuss graduate programs (Masters and Doctorate) **stricto sensu** at a distance. Such an initiative shows that DE gains strength, and that the Agency positioned to lay down normative instructions is concerned with the quality of the programs offered at a distance.

### What characterizes Distance Education

Several are the definitions presented for DE, but in all of them the focus is placed on the physical separation between teacher and students and on information and communication technologies (ICTs).

An important aspect to be considered is the economic factor, since the average cost of DE courses is lower than those face-to-face.

Another aspect is the feeling of distance and isolation geared by the lack of interpersonal contact that can be seen as demotivating in online courses.

Although DE has advantages, it should be highlighted that there is still prejudice against courses offered in this model, especially with regard to its quality compared to traditional classroom courses.

It draws attention to the fact that many students still show dissatisfaction in DE courses. This dissatisfaction may be related to the lack of qualification of the teachers, who are not used and able to act in virtual environments. There is verified lack of training and continuing learning for these teachers.

In addition, students' dissatisfaction can be related to the didactic materials. It is not possible to transfer the classroom material to an online teaching platform indistinctly, because the media are different and require adaptations.

**The sensation of distance and isolation can be seen as demotivating factors in online courses.**

It is important to state that dropout rate in DE courses is still high. According to the EAD.BR 2016 Census (Analytical Report on Distance learning in Brazil), the rate ranges from 11% to 25%, and the reasons attributed to that are financial issues, lack of time and lack of familiarity with the model. Also, according to the Census, public institutions are the ones which least know the reasons for dropout rates. The percentage ranges between 41% and 46%.

### Trends in private higher education institutions

There is a trend, among private educational institutions of higher education to implement, in their face-to-face programs, blended learning and/ or distance education disciplines. It must be observed, however, what the Administrative Ruling No. 1,134, of October 10, 2016 provides. According to that Administrative Ruling, the offerings of



online disciplines, either in whole or in part, cannot exceed 20% of the total course load.

Blended learning is a model that consists of having part of the discipline being held face-to-face (in the classroom) and part of it in a learning management system (LMS). On the other hand, DE disciplines are those offered entirely in a LMS. Examples of systems that can be used as learning environments are *Blackboard* and *Moodle*, among others.

Resuming the blended learning and DE issue, it must be pointed out that they are different from those which students are accustomed to in traditional education where the teacher is

**Blended and DE models require more discipline and self-learning.**

usually seen as a source of knowledge, and students are mere recipients of information and passive agents of the learning process; therefore, there is difficulty, and even resistance, in accepting new models that require a lot of discipline and self-learning, for example.

### 10 Important Recommendations for Teachers

1. Have a clear planning of the objectives, methods and forms of dissemination of content and didactic materials in virtual learning environments; 2. Be familiar with the virtual environment and its digital tools; 3. Make students able to use the virtual environment; 4. Make clear to students the objectives of using digital tools in the discipline; 5. Make clear to students what is expected of them; 6. Be aware of the students' profile and their expectations; 7. Have support of a technical staff of the institution for the video recordings, if the discipline makes use of them; 8. Have support of a technician of the institution in instructional design that adapts to the electronic means the material, and didactic content of the discipline, in case the teacher does not want or know how to do it. 9. Have support of the institution to get qualified (if necessary) to offer his/her discipline in these modalities; 10. Have assistance of the pedagogical coordination for professional training.

### 10 Important Recommendations for Students

1. Be familiar with the virtual learning environment; 2. Have guidance (of a tutor / teacher) regarding their doubts and difficulties in the use of the virtual environment and digital tools, as well as in the resolutions of their pedagogical doubts; 3. Have discipline and responsibility for their learning process; 4. Have clear that the virtual environment allows the students to work on their pace and study time; 5. Be aware that they are co-authors of the teaching and learning process and that the teacher is a facilitator (guidance) of this process; 6. Know the importance of collaboration and interaction

among the agents involved in the educational process; 7. Have clear the objectives of the discipline and what is expected of them; 8. Have clear what blended and distance formats are, the reason for their choice and use, and what and how these formats can contribute to the student's learning process; 9. Demonstrate and ask for support from the teacher or tutor whenever they feel insecure or unable to develop the studies and work in these environments; 10. Do the activities and proposals presented by the teacher on the dates assigned to them, following the established schedule.

It is important to highlight that the professors' qualification and the students' familiarity with blended and DE formats can contribute to diminishing the resistance and dissatisfactions usually found among students of these educational models.



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This article is a result of the authors' ascertainment and analysis, without compulsorily reflecting CEST's opinion.