

Prairie State College

Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education

Introduction

In accordance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA)(Public Law 110-315), Federal Requirement 34 CFR §602.17(g), and HLC Policy Number FDCR.A.10.050, institutions offering distance or correspondence education must have processes to establish that the student who registers in such courses is the same student who participates in and receives academic credit. Prairie State College offers online courses, which fall under the definition of distance education, and this document applies to all programs beginning with the application for admission and continuing through a student's final day at the institution.

Practices for Verification of Student Identity

The following institutional practices are identified by the HEOA/HLC as acceptable for verifying student identity:

- A secure login and password
- Proctored examinations
- New or other technologies and practices

Secure Login and Password

During the application for admission process, student identity is vetted in accordance with standard practices. Here, a network account is created for all credit-seeking students. A letter is mailed to them providing students their username and password. Verbiage in the letter and the login screen remind students that by logging in you agree to the Usage Policy approved by the Prairie State College Board of Trustees. This policy can be found on our website at prairiestate.edu/itr.

24 x 7 Self-service Password Reset Tool

Network user account credentials are managed by authorized administrators at Prairie State College. Users can self-manage certain functions of their account such as changing their password by enrolling in the college account management system at <https://password.prairiestate.edu>. Here, users set up security questions and/or alternate email or text numbers to facilitate the reset of their accounts. This service is available 24 x 7.

Proctored Examinations

Currently, there are very few online faculty who use proctored exams. Given PSC's definition of online courses, using proctored exams makes the course a hybrid course and, as such, the information on proctored exams would need to be clearly presented to students as part of the Master Schedule. However, the use of proctored exams is clearly an option for faculty and may become more important to consider given the increasing attention on student authentication. The Student Success Center's make-up testing services (Room 2639) provide faculty with the option of conducting proctored exams for students living within the region. For students living outside the region— e.g., University of Illinois student taking PSC online course—it would be the student's

responsibility to locate a proctored testing environment and pay any fees that may be incurred. Many community colleges and higher education institutions have comparable testing facilities that could be used for proctored exams. As with other information concerning online courses, clearly conveying this information to students would be a high priority.

LockDown Browser

The LockDown Browser is a custom browser that locks down the testing environment within D2L. When this is deployed, students are unable to copy, print, access other applications, or visit other websites during the online quiz or exam. LockDown Browser can be installed on a student's personal computer or is available in the computer labs on campus. In addition, Respondus Monitor can be used in conjunction with LockDown Browser to monitor a student's activities during an exam via a webcam. Irregularities are flagged and these videos can be reviewed later by the instructor. If this feature is used, students should be informed before beginning the course that they need access to a webcam. If their computer does not have a built-in camera, an attachable webcam can be purchased at most electronic stores for a nominal price. Cameras are currently not available on campus computers. For more information on proctored examinations and the lock down browser, please review the [Faculty Handbook for Online Education](#).

Population of Data from Student Information System

College systems that facilitate user access to college functions like registration and billing, course delivery, and student email are populated directly and automatically by the student information system. Accessing these systems require a student to authenticate using their network user account.

Learning Management Course and User Data

Course sections and rosters are populated automatically by the student information system each semester. Information is loaded daily to account for section changes or student adds and drops. All credit courses and vocational sections for non-credit courses are included. Non-credit courses considered Personal Interest courses are not included. Users may not create their own courses or accounts, ensuring that only those with valid network user accounts may access the system and that users may only access sections for which they are enrolled.

Remote Support for an Online Student

Students require support from the different areas of the college like advising, financial aid, and enrollment services, to name a few. The college has established a procedure to provide quality service while maintaining procedures to validate student identity.

Prairie State College will utilize Google Hangout to support students. Here, the student will authenticate to their student email account that is hosted by Google. The student will email a request to a support service area like advising, for example. The advisor in this case will create a Google hangout session and invite the student via their student email account. The student can then click on the link in their email and begin working with the advisor. The advisor can also initiate this process. Once in a hangout, Prairie State staff and student can talk with voice or video. In addition, either can share their screen if necessary and within the context of the conversation.

Responsibilities

All users of the College's learning management system, Desire2Learn, are responsible for maintaining the security of usernames, passwords, and other access credentials as required. An account is given to an individual for the exclusive use by that individual. Attempting to discover another user's password or attempts to gain unauthorized access to another person's files or mail is prohibited.

Faculty

Faculty teaching courses through distance education methods hold primary responsibility for ensuring that students comply with identify verification policy. As technology and personal accountability are not absolute in determining a student's identity, faculty members are encouraged to design courses that use assignments and evaluations that support academic integrity. Changes in student behavior such as sudden shifts in academic performance or changes in writing style or language used in discussion groups or email may indicate academic integrity problems. Instructors routinely should use a variety of assessment instruments. As best practices suggest, faculty should routinely ask students to share in appropriate ways important ideas learned from texts and references, require research projects and paper assignments to be submitted in steps, and/or use Turnitin.com.