Distance and distributed education at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry is developed and delivered through ESF Outreach Office (http://www.esf.edu/outreach/). ESF Outreachbrings together several offices, departments, and programs that extend beyond its own campus to area schools, businesses and the community, for the purpose of enriching the lives of our constituents and stakeholders. ESF Outreach programs solve real-world problems by linking people to necessary resources. This is done by mobilizing university assets, faculty and expert partners to provide a wide range of services and a diverse curriculum which best addresses individual needs and current social issues. To inform ESF Outreach efforts, guidance is solicited from several advisory councils comprised of practitioners, educators, and leaders from public, private, educational and nonprofit organizations. Partnerships enable ESF Outreach to provide the most superlative and informative educational and professional experiences.

ESF Outreach staff provides planning, marketing, management and evaluation support to faculty-driven and faculty-partnered programs and projects, often pursued with off-campus partners, in an effort to link ESF’s academic and research resources to people and organizations who share a commitment to improve our world. In order to do this ESF Outreach offers a number of classroom based credit courses and certificate programs through the college aimed at non-matriculated and/or part time students. These late afternoon or evening classes accommodated the needs of “local” continuing education students.

Through projects and profiessonal development opportunities afforded largely by external grants, ESF Outreach has developed a fair degree of staff expertise and experience with the development and delivery of online and distance learning (e.g., webinars) and has utilized these approaches in a range of credit and non-credit educational and professional development courses and programs. Moreover, virtually all of these endeavors have involved ESF faculty as grant project collabaortors (i.e., Priniple Investigators and Co-principle Investigatros). As a result, a small but critical number of faculty have gained tremendous insight and experience with online and other distance lelarning programs and projects.

SUNY ESF has a bigger plan and in their “Vision for 2020” document (<http://www.esf.edu/vision2020/vision2020.pdf>) one of their intended goals is to “achieve distinction in the areas of distance learning”….keeping them competitive and meeting the needs of tomorrows students.

To accomplish this, ESF Outreach has worked diligently to develop and distribute a number of courses and programs via a distance learning format, which has over recent years become known as **“ESF-Online.”** The chart below shows the progress ESF Outreach has made along these lines and its goals for the future of ESF-Online:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ESF-Distance Leanring Offerings** | | | |
|  | **Non-Credit** | **Credit** | **Certificates** | |
| **2008** | Developing | Developing / Piloting | Developing | |
| **2009** | Pilot offered | Piloting 2 | Developing | |
| **2010** | 5 | 4 | Developing | |
| **2011** | 7 | 5 | Developing | |
| **2012** | 11 | 7 | 1 | |
| **2013** | 15 | 9 | 1 | |
| **2014** | 21 | 12 | 1 | |

During the 2010-2011 academic year ESF-Online offered five credit bearing courses listed below:

1. [EFB 120 - The Global Environment and the Evolution of Human Culture](http://www.esf.edu/esfonline/globalenvironment.htm) (3) This course also fulfills SUNY General Education credit in either Natural Science or Social Science.
2. [ESC 296 - Climate Change Science and Sustainability](http://www.esf.edu/esfonline/climatechange.htm) (1)
3. [ESC 496 - Climate Change Science and Environmental Meteorology](http://www.esf.edu/esfonline/climatemeteorology.htm) (3 )
4. [EFB 796 - University Outreach: Focus on Online Learning](http://www.esf.edu/esfonline/universityoutreach.htm) (3)
5. **FOR 296 - Concepts in Watershed Hydrology (1)**

All courses offered online are equivalent in course content and academic rigor to courses taught in a traditional classroom. Online courses are governed by the same quality standards including faculty review, approval of curricula, standards for hiring instructors, and mandatory end of the course evaluations. Class sizes are limited to insure and encourage a high level of online interaction for all participants. ESF-Online also uses standards and practices for distance education identified by peer institutions and articulated as quality benchmarks by higher education organizations such as the Institute for Higher Education Policy. (<http://www.ihep.org/)>

Courses offered through ESF-Online are carefully develops to mirror degree/certificate requirements established for on-campus delivery as listed in the college catalog.( <http://www.esf.edu/catalog/>) ESF-Online continually strives to emulate the college’s strategic goals of Access, Quality, Economic Development, Alliances, and Technology. The college maintains responsibility for all of ESF-Online offerings and ensures that each is consistent with the college’s mission. (<http://www.esf.edu/welcome/mission.htm>) What's more is that ESF’s online courses strive to meet all legal and regulatory requirements. This is done by following the best practices in fair use guidelines offered by the Center for Social Media (<http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/fair-use/best-practices/documentary/documentary-filmmakers-statement-best-practices-fair-use>) along with copyright guidelines for course reserves offered by Moon Library. (<http://www.esf.edu/moonlib/services/copyright.htm>) Information and technology accessibility issues are governed by the NYS IT Accessibility Curriculum and Resources Policy (<http://www.nysforum.org/accessibility/resources/nyspolicy/nyspolicy.html>)

Furthermore ESF-Online incorporates standards and practices that ensure course security, archiving materials and support for technical issues for faculty and students at all times.

Course materials and instructional resources are securely stored and delivery through Blackboard. (<http://blackboard.syr.edu/>) Blackboard is the course management system employed by ESF-Online to deliver its online learning content. Blackboard is provided through a institutional contract with our partner, Syracuse University (SU). SU Information Technology department (SUIT) handles and maintains Blackboard and provides additional help through hands-on and web based instructions for faculty, instructors, and students. Each semester the SUIT offers a number of hands on training sessions which include topics such as: using the Grade Book, using Collaboration Tools, Assessments and Assignments, Library Resources, and Instructional Design in Blackboard. There are also a number of short training videos available directly from the Blackboard homepage and from the On Demand Learning Center. (<http://ondemand.blackboard.com/r9/index.htm>)

Blackboard is available to students and faculty 24/7/365 though any available internet access point. Student and faculty experiencing any technical issues can contact SUIT weekdays from 8 to 5 by phone or email at any time for help. To aid in reducing technology issues ESF-Online tests course content on a variety of computer platforms, speeds and operating systems. Students are then advised as to minimum standards required to achieve successful delivery of course content prior to the start of the course.

Moreover, while maintaining ease in the delivery of course content, ESF-Online strives to assure the very best quality in instructional design that goes into online courses. This starts with providing training and design tools to new online faculty. As already mentioned above, faculty can partake in professional development activities and training through BlackBoard as well as general online course development through the SUNY Learning Network. (<http://wiki.sln.suny.edu/display/SLNED/SLN+Education+Services>) ESF-Online requires all new online instructors to receive mentoring from ESF veteran online faculty and they must also have a master’s degree or higher or instructors must possess an expertise in the field and be cleared by the department chair and/or department faculty depending on individual protocols. This same precedent applies to the selection of courses and material to be offered.

To insure quality and consistency are met and that courses being offered are meeting the goals and mission of the institution, ESF-Online often utilizes colleagues and consultants with expertise in, for example, instructional design, learning technologies, marketing and promotion, evaluation and relevant discpoline and professional expertise. , Instructors and faculty have access to a course designer through the ESF Outreach Office aiding them in areas of design, development and evaluation that satisfies the collge mission. To this extent ESF-Online requires each course to have some type of formative or summative evaluation built-in to its design, more than just a final assessed grade (http://www.esf.edu/iq/testing.htm). This can be seen in ESF Outreach’s Annual Report. (<http://www.esf.edu/outreach/ar2010.pdf>)

To further solidifying quality assurances in course design, all courses being developed are reviewed by ESF faculty. New courses must be reviewed and officially adopted by the Faculty Governance Committee on Instruction. ESF-Online also periodically selects new courses for outside evaluation from the instructional design faculty at Syracuse University. Evaluations include course review by educational specialist using rubric adapted from the Quality Matters online learning site. (<http://qminstitute.org/home/Public%20Library/About%20QM/RubricStandards2008-2010.pdf> )

**Besides ESF Outreach’s focus on ESF-Online they also host a variety of conferences and symposiums that are local, state, regional, national and international. These meetings usually revolve around the topic of environmental and natural resources, but are not limited to these topics. Some examples include: the New York State Green Building Conference, Central New York Biotechnology Symposium, and the New York State Geographic Information Systems Conference. Many of these conferences/symposiums offer workshops, classes or courses where continuing education credits (CEUs) can be earned and used towards licensure renewal for NYS Engineers, NYS Landscape Architects and NYS Architects (http://www.esf.edu/outreach/ce/).**

**Lastly, ESF Outreach also offers workshops and webinars designed for students, faculty and administrators based on teaching and learning goals. Recent webinars included Green E-ship, Teacher professional development on energy, Leading Sustainability Program, Climate Change for Non-profits, Solar Power as Renewable Energy (SPARE) (http://www.esf.edu/outreach/k12/).**