

## Gannon University Distance Education

Procedure Title: Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education

Responsible Division/Department: Academic Affairs, Distance Education, CETL

Purpose:

The purpose of this procedure document is to ensure that Gannon operates in compliance with Accreditation-relevant federal regulations and the provisions of the United States Federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) concerning the verification of student identity in distance learning.

Procedure:

All credit-bearing courses and programs offered through distance learning methods must verify that the student who registers for a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives academic credit. One or more of the following methods must be used:

- a) A secure login and pass code;
- b) Proctored examinations; and/or
- c) New or emerging technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

Gannon University meets all three criteria. Distance students must login to a secure Blackboard (LMS) Website with a unique username and password to complete distance courses. This login is sent to them on their schedule and student bill and is also provided from the admissions office. The students are notified during their required online student orientation to only use their Gannon accounts for Gannon online course work and communications with the institution. Online course information and other identifying information is only sent to the student's Gannon e-mail address.

### **Password Security Enhancements 2021 - Length, Complexity, and Resets**

In 2020, ITS implemented Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) which has increased our security posture and has reduced compromised accounts. Migrating from 6 to 12 character passwords using passphrases is a simple but effective way to provide the University additional protection.

**New Password Security Policy:** 12 characters including spaces; *no numbers, capitals or special characters required*, expire once a year, and MFA is enforced off campus.

Believe...

## New Policy Details

1. **Use a passphrase; it is easier to remember** - Example passphrases include: (Please do not use the examples)
  - o *“MyAlmaMater-Gannon”*
  - o *"Go Gannon Knights"*
2. **Require the initial password to change at first login** or whenever the password is reset by the Help Desk.
  - a. The initial/reset password will be same as it is today, except doubled to meet the 12 characters requirement.
    - SSN+Initials, ie. 3425GD3425GD or
    - Last 4 of Sevis ID+Initials, ie. 2321AA2321AA

During the sign-in process the user will be prompted for an identification code through provided alternative email, phone number or authentication app. This added layer is designed to be enforced off campus only where most vulnerability can occur. You will not be prompted while on campus.

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) is a Microsoft feature that adds another layer of security to protecting your account. Gannon has moved toward MFA because it is more secure account protection for the Gannon Community. Depending on what information you provided when setting up the Self-Service Password Reset (SSPR).

Verification methods:

- Text/call to phone number provided. This could be cell or office phone number.
- Microsoft Authenticator app (requires download of Microsoft Authenticator App on your phone)

MFA relies on two forms of authentication, having the password for the account and having access to a trusted device. When you sign in from outside the Gannon network, you will be prompted for the MFA. If you are connected with the SonicWALL NetExtender VPN, you will still get prompted for the MFA verification. With your Gannon work or school account, there's no way for you to individually turn it off.

All users of the University's learning management systems are responsible for maintaining the security of usernames, passwords and any other personal information. Access credentials to any Gannon system or course publisher sites may not be shared or given to anyone other than the student to whom they were assigned for any reason. Students are responsible for any and all uses

of their account. Students are responsible for changing passwords periodically to maintain security. Students are held responsible for knowledge of the information contained within the most recent ITS code of conduct as well as the Student Handbook. Failure to read University guidelines, requirements and regulations will not exempt students from responsibility and can result in the disabling of the student's Gannon user account.

When a distance student calls in to the Helpdesk for assistance in resetting their Blackboard LMS password, they are prompted to change their password by visiting the "I forgot my password" Website. This ensures they are entering their credentials directly into the system so that our team does not give out specific username and email information. Thus, the student verifies who they are by following the prompts on the password reset form, which sends an email to their Gannon email address; the student has to click on the unique link provided through the e-mail message in order to reset their password. Campus students registered for online instruction can also visit the ITS Helpdesk in person and provide the last 4 digits of the social security number and birth month to directly reset the password. Finally, students can also setup a pin and challenge question in the GU portal to reset their password more easily on their own. Only the ITS department and the helpdesk staff have access to resetting student passwords.

Most Gannon distance courses make use of student-centered, authentic assessments requiring students to perform work unique to the student, the student's workplace and to the course itself. In rare instances distance courses utilize traditional assessments facilitated with the use of an electronic proctor. CETL offers access to Respondus Lockdown Browser with Monitor for remote online exam proctoring. LockDown Browser is custom browser that locks down the testing environment within a learning system. Students cannot print, copy, access other applications, or search the internet during an online exam. Respondus Monitor utilizes a Webcam that allows students to take online assessments from a remote location while ensuring the integrity of the exam process.

All distance nursing students are required to acquire a University student identification badge that is to be worn at nursing clinical sites. Students are to e-mail a completed request form, an electronic portrait (.bmp/.jpg) with a plain background and a scanned image of a valid driver's license or other form of state identification. The cost of the identification badge is explained as students enter the program.

The procedure in this document is the responsibility of Distance Education within the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

*Believe...*