Name of Policy	Policy on Online Education
Brief Description of the Policy	The Policy is formulated in accordance with the University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and subsequent amendments. It is divided into four major parts viz. - Admission Policy, Fees and Refund Policy, Examination Policy and Grievance Redressal Policy

The Policy establishes robust mechanisms for learner authentication, plagiarism detection, and secure proctored examinations, and shall emphasise continuous learner engagement through the mandatory Four-Quadrant Approach.

The Policy shall further define the credit framework, grading system, accessibility standards, and quality assurance processes and shall ensure that the online programmes delivered by University shall uphold the principles of academic integrity, innovation, inclusion, and excellence in digital higher education in full compliance with UGC Regulations 2020.

It further ensures that academic standards, learner support systems, evaluation mechanisms, and technological infrastructure for online education shall be maintained at par with conventional higher education. |
| **Approved by** | Governing Body in meeting dated 6th August 2024. |
| **References for the policy** | 1. University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and subsequent amendments |

<u>**PART A – FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK**</u>

1. <u>**Introduction**</u>:

   a. The Policy has been formulated in accordance with the provisions of the University Grants Commission (UGC). Amendments to UGC (Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and its subsequent amendments.

   b. It shall take effect from the date of approval by the Governing Body.

   c. The Policy sets out the minimum standards of teaching and learning required for awarding a Certificate, Diploma, or Degree through online mode, delivered using internet-based interactive technologies.

   d. It shall be applicable to the University for offering academic programmes through online education, except for programmes in engineering, law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, architecture, physiotherapy, applied arts, and any other disciplines that are either restricted or prohibited from being delivered through online or distance learning modes by statutory councils or regulatory bodies, or as notified from time to time.

   e. The University affirms that it has developed and is maintaining the prescribed e-learning material readiness — at least the first year of PG programmes and first three semesters of UG programmes — as mandated by the UGC Online Regulations 2020.

2. <u>**Definitions in the Policy, unless the context otherwise requires:**</u>

   a. 'Board of Management and Academic Council' means the bodies empowered to take decisions regarding all academic matters in a University including the decision permitting Online Courses or Programmes of studies in compliance to the

regulations

b. 'Certificate' means an award, not being a Degree or Diploma, granted by the University, certifying that the recipient has successfully completed an Online Course or Programme of study of minimum six months duration

c. 'Credit' means the Unit award, gained as learning outcome, by a learner by study efforts required to acquire the prescribed level of learning in respect of that Unit Explanation: It is hereby clarified that a study effort for one credit means time required by a learner to understand the contents equivalent to 15 hours classroom teaching

d. 'Degree' means an award, not being a Certificate or Diploma, granted by a University, certifying that the recipient has successfully completed an Online Course or Programme of study of minimum three years duration in case of graduate degree and includes a post-graduate degree, where such award is granted after an Online Course or Programme of study of minimum two years duration

e. 'Diploma' means an award, not being a Certificate or Degree, granted by a University, certifying that the recipient has successfully completed an Online

f. Course or Programme of study of minimum one year duration

g. 'e-Learning Material' means and includes contents in the form of structured course material, as a part of one or more courses in the Online Course or Programme, in digital format delivered through Learning Management System, which is inter-alia self-explanatory, self-contained, self-directed at the learner, and amenable to self-evaluation, and enables the learner to acquire the prescribed level of learning in a course of study, but does not include text- books or guide-books

h. 'Examination Centre' means a place, where examinations are conducted for the online mode learners, having the requisite infrastructure including security features for smooth conduct of such examinations

i. 'Higher Education' means such education, imparted by means of conducting regular classes or through open and distance education systems or through online education system, beyond twelve years of schooling and leading to the award of a

Certificate or Diploma or Degree as the case may be

j. 'Information and Communication Technology' means the devices, tools, content, resources, forums that can be converted into or delivered through digital forms, which can be deployed for realizing the goals of teaching learning, enhancing access to and reach of resources, building of capacities, as well as management of the educational system

k. 'Learner Support Services' means and includes such services as are provided by the University in order to facilitate the teaching-learning experiences by the learner

l. 'Learning Management System' means a system to keep track of delivery of e-Learning Programs, learner's engagement, assessment, results and reporting in one centralized location

m. 'MOOCs' shall have the same meaning as assigned to it under sub-regulation 3.6 of regulation 3 of the UGC (Credit Framework for Online learning courses through SWAYAM) Regulations 2016

n. 'Online Course or Programme' means the Course or Programme of studies which is delivered through online mode leading to award of a Certificate or Diploma or Degree by an approved University and recognised under these Regulations;

o. 'Proctored Examination' means the examination conducted under the physical supervision of approved neutral person who ensures the identity of the test taker and the integrity of the test taking environment

p. 'SWAYAM' (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) means the learning management system as specified in the UGC (Credit Framework for online learning courses through SWAYAM) Regulation 2016

q. 'Self-Learning e-Module' means a modular unit of e-learning material which is inter-alia self- explanatory, self-contained, self-directed at the learner, and amenable to self-evaluation, and enables the learner to acquire the prescribed level of learning in a course of study and includes contents in the form of a combination of the following e-Learning content, namely:

   i.   e-Text Materials

ii.   Video Lectures
iii.   Audio-Visual interactive material
iv.   Virtual Classroom sessions
v.   Audio Podcasts
vi.   Virtual Simulation, and
vii.   Self-Assessment Quizzes or Tests

3.   The University:

University means ATLAS SkillTech University Established on 4th August, 2021 notification as issued by the SKILL DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEPARTMENT, Government of Maharashtra, No. KOUVIU-2021/C.R.(45/21)/Udyojkta.

4.   The University fulfills following conditions namely:

a.   It has been in existence for the last four years

b.   It is accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with a score of 3.04 on a 4-point scale with A Grade.

c.   The University shall offer Online Courses or Programme in only those disciplines in which it has already been offering the same or similar Courses or Programmes in regular mode (of classroom teaching) or in Open and Distance Learning mode and from which at least one batch has been passed out:

d.   The University shall offer Certificate, Diploma and Degree Courses or Programmes in full-fledged online mode subject to the condition that all such Courses or Programmes are duly approved by the statutory authorities or bodies of the University and the delivery mechanism conforms to the quality standards of the Online education as specified under the regulations.

5.   The University shall have the following capabilities:

a.   By in-house faculty for designing courses of the Course or Programme and developing the same in a manner that can impart skills and knowledge;

b.   With the technology for production including in-house or duly out-sourced

production facilities for converting the courses of a Course or Programme into Online Courses or Programmes in the following minimum four quadrants, namely,

    i.   Learning videos with recording or dubbing or editing facilities for graphics or animation creation;

    ii.   e-content for reading and improving comprehension of learners;

    iii.   tests and assignments that test the understanding; and

    iv.   discussion forum that clarifies the doubts of the learner

c. Learner Authentication - integrated with AADHAAR or other government recognised identity for Indian students and Passport for foreign students;

d. Learner Registration - through a web application with supporting documents;

e. Payment Gateway –using Digital Payment system;

f. Learning Management System - which tracks the delivery of a Course or Programme, learner's engagement, assessment, results, and reporting supported by analytical tools that can help the teachers to extract and use the relevant reports;

g. With ability to conduct examinations either using technology-enabled online test with all the security arrangements ensuring transparency and credibility of the examinations, or through the Proctored Examination;

6. The University shall confirm to:

a. Any LMS developed in house or outsourced shall be used as applicable and as approved by the expert committee after due verification:

b. The University will deliver programmes through approved Learning Management System integrated with proctored assessment tools. Wherever feasible, courses will also be offered through the SWAYAM platform as per UGC directions.

c. Provided further that the content and the designing and development of courses of the Course or Programme shall be developed by the in house faculty;

d. The Courses or Programmes shall be designed for conventional learners, as well

as working professionals and other individuals aspiring to acquire knowledge and associated academic credentials;

7. Online learning shall have the following four quadrants 'approach', namely:

a. Quadrant-I i.e. e-Tutorial that shall contain - Video and Audio Contents, animation, simulations, virtual labs;

b. Quadrant-II i.e. e-Content, that shall contain - Portable Document Format or e-Books or Illustration, video demonstrations, documents and interactive simulations, wherever required;

c. Quadrant-III i.e. Web Resources, that shall contain - Related Links, Open Content on Internet, Case Studies, Historical development of the subject, Articles;

d. Quadrant-IV i.e. Self-Assessment, that shall contain – MCQ, Problems, Quizzes, Assignments and solutions, Discussion forum topics and setting up the FAQ, Clarifications on general misconceptions;

e. The University shall confirm that all e-learning content is developed in all four quadrants (e-Tutorials, e-Content, Web Resources, Self-Assessment).

f. University shall also ensure that Learning materials comply with accessibility standards, including screen-reader compatibility, captioned videos, and mobile-friendly formats to support learners with special needs, as per UGC accessibility requirements.

g. As perUniversity Grants Commission (UGC). Amendments to UGC (Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and its subsequent amendments, at least 60 per cent. of e-Learning Material shall be developed by the in-house faculty of the Higher Educational Institution and remaining per cent. of the material can be sourced from available e-resources such as Open Educational Resources (OER), SWAYAM or other source, duly approved by the statutory authorities of the Higher Educational Institution.

8. Other Required Components like Mandatory Disclosure and status report:

a. Apart from the actual Course or Programme delivery, other components such as Counseling Process, Online Application Processing and fee payment shall also be provided through Online Mode;

b. There shall be provision for continuous assessment of the learner;

c. Examinations shall be conducted through Proctored Examination and in conformity with any other norms for such examination as may be laid down by the Commission from time to time;

d. The Program-wise information such as duration, start and end dates, fee, number of students, name of students with identifier, results shall be uploaded on the website of the University within ten days from the end of each activity and shall be updated on a continuous basis;

e. Upload the mandatory self-disclosure for Online Courses or Programmes on its website every year within 10 days of completion of each activity, as per UGC Regulation 9.

f. Submit an annual status report to the UGC covering enrolments, credits offered, pass/fail rates, faculty details, and any revisions in programme structure.

g. Undergo third-party academic audit every two years and internal quality audit annually.

9. Curricular – Assessment – Credit Framework Aspects:

a. The University shall evolve the curricular aspects, assessment criteria and Credit framework for the award of Degree or Diploma or Certificate adopting the following requirement, namely

b. The course content for each course shall be clearly defined, each having modular e-content, delivered online in a structured format, with clearly spelt out learning outcomes which students are expected to acquire at the end of the module;

c. Courses or Programmes architecture shall permit the online teacher or instructor to add multi- media enriched and interactive content, activities and assessments to extend learning opportunities and shall be easy to navigate;

d. A Certificate Course or Programme shall be of minimum of six months' duration and shall have minimum twenty credits;

e. A Diploma Course or Programme shall be of minimum of one year duration and shall have minimum forty credits;

f. The Credits and minimum duration for the Degree Courses or Programmes offered Online shall be the same as specified by the Commission under Choice Based Credit System (CBCS);

g. The maximum duration for completing the Online Course or Programme shall be double the minimum duration of the Course or Programme or as laid down by the Commission from time to time;

h. The University shall decide the number of credits for an Online Course or Programme at Certificate and Diploma level having duration more than minimum duration, proportionally based on those given in item (iii) and item (iv);

i. In lieu of internships mandated for on campus programs , **Project-based learning** shall be integrated into the curriculum structure of Online Programmes as detailed below:

For 3 years BBA (Online Programme) one project shall be *Project I (Semester III):* Secondary Research Project – 2 Credits

Project II (Semester V): Primary Research Project – 2 Credits

MBA (Online Programme):

Research Methodology and Dissertation (Semester III): 3 Credits

j. **Guidelines for Freshers Enrolled in Both Programmes:** Learners enrolled as freshers in the BBA and MBA Online Programmes are required to identify and secure their own internship opportunities, if they wish to gain industry exposure in addition to the mandatory project work. The University shall provide necessary academic guidance and mentorship for project work; however, facilitation or placement support for internships will not be extended under the Online Mode.

k. The academic sessions shall begin either from July – August or from January–

February every year.

10. Availability of assessment mechanism:

a. Each course in the Online Course or Programme shall have a precise assessment mechanism for the identified learning outcomes at each level for both continuous formative and summative assessments.

b. The ratio of Internal and External Assessment weightage will be 30 : 70

11. Identified technological interface and interoperability:

The Online Course or Programme shall be able to utilize a variety of technology tools, shall have a user-friendly interface and meet accessibility standards for interoperability and access for learners with special needs**.**

12. Professional Online Courses or Programmes:

If the University intends to offer professional Online Course or Programme in subject areas other than those excluded in sub-regulation (2) of regulation 2, the proposal of Online Courses or Programme, submitted to the University Grants Commission along with the application for approval, shall include copy of the approval granted by the professional or statutory body or council concerned for offering such Course or Programme in Online mode and compliance to the requirements of the appropriate professional or statutory council for the Course or Programme covered in their domain shall be responsibility of the University.

13. Learners' Requirements for Enrollment for Online Courses or Programmes:

Learners to be enrolled for the Online Courses or Programmes shall be acquainted with the requisite information or literacy skills for which there shall be a help-line for technical assistance throughout the semester.

14. Learner's Authentication Requirements:

The University shall exercise proper learner's authentication practice to ensure the academic integrity and the students, at the time of enrolment and all assessments for examinations, shall be required to provide the ADHAAR number or other government recognized identifier or Passport number, as applicable and verify their information for authentication for which necessary infrastructure or software shall be provided to them by the University

15. Active Engagement of the Learners:

Active engagement in online or virtual class shall be monitored via participation in asynchronous or synchronous discussions, assignment activity and Course or Programme involvement and the analytics of Learning Management System shall be used for ensuring the learner's participation at least for two hours every fortnight.

16. Technical Know-how or Skills Requirements for Course Mentors:

The University shall have defined criteria or guidelines for the technical know-how and skill requirements of the online Course Mentors, Director, Deputy Director (Online Course or Programme) and Course or Programme Coordinators to ascertain that all the resources are competent to deliver online education effectively from the student learning perspective and continuous up gradation of skills shall be essential for embracing newer methodologies and Information and communication technology tools for enhancing the development and delivery of the Online Course or Programmes in the long run.

17. Learners' Support Services and e-Learning Materials:

The University shall provide adequate support for advising, counseling, mentoring and guidance so as to ensure the best possible learning experience for the learners and there shall be clear guidelines on academic integrity and netiquette (internet etiquette) expectations regarding lesson activities, group discussions, chats and plagiarism

18. Security:

a. Each award of Degree or Diploma or Certificate shall be assigned an unique identification number and shall have AADHAR number or other government recognized identifier or Passport number, as applicable, along with other details of the student and the Course or Programme and shall be uploaded on the National Academic Depository.

b. All learner data, including Aadhaar/Passport details and assessment results, will be stored in secure servers with dashboards for monitoring and analytics. IP tracking, encryption, and audit trails will ensure data security and protect intellectual property of both learners and faculty.

19. Quality Assurance:

The University shall take the following steps, namely

a. Establish Internal Quality Assurance Cell on lines of Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA) as specified in the University Grants Commission

b. Take adequate measures for training and capacity building of its teaching and administrative staff at regular intervals

c. Ensure that the quality of Course or Programme of study offered through online mode is maintained on a par with standards laid down by the Commission or the other appropriate statutory authority from time to time

d. Ensure that the technical and instructional facilities with information resources for online delivery of Course or Programme are in compliance to the guidelines laid by the Commission from time to time, and are commensurate with the number of Course or Programme and enrolments thereto

e. The University shall adhere to guidelines on quality assurance mechanism pertaining to Online Course or Programme issued by the Commission from time to time

f. The CIQA will also maintain compliance dashboards to track faculty-student ratios, learner participation hours, LMS analytics, proctored examination

integrity, and plagiarism check reports for submission to the UGC on demand.

20. Faculty and Staff Requirements for running Online Programmes:

Centre / Cell for Online Courses or Programmes:

a. The University shall create a separate Centre for Distance and Online Education for effective coordination among its Departments or Schools of Studies offering the Course or Programme, Admission or Registration Unit, Examination Unit and Technology Support Unit

b. The Centre for Distance and Online Education shall maintain and administer, in collaboration with the technology support Unit of the University, the Centralized Data Base of all online Courses or Programmes

c. The appointments and duties of academic and administrative staff for the Centre for Distance and Online Education shall be in accordance with the University Grants Commission (UGC). Amendments to UGC (Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 and its subsequent amendments.

21. Plagiarism Policy:

a. University shall establish a mechanism to enhance awareness about responsible conduct of research and academic activities, to promote academic integrity and to prevent plagiarism. However, the similarity checks for plagiarism shall exclude the following:

   i. All quoted work reproduced with all necessary permission and/or attribution.
   ii. All references, bibliography, table of content, preface and acknowledgements.
   iii. All generic terms, laws, standard symbols and standards equations.

b. The University shall use UGC-approved plagiarism detection software for all learner submissions and will report serious breaches to the Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP).

c. Penalties in case of plagiarism in submission of thesis and dissertations Institutional Academic Integrity Panel (IAIP) shall impose penalty considering the severity of the Plagiarism.

    i.   Level 0: Similarities upto 10% - Minor Similarities, no penalty.

    ii.   Level 1: Similarities above 10% to 40% - Such student shall be asked to submit a revised script within a stipulated time period.

    iii.   Level 2: Similarities above 40% to 60% - Such student shall be debarred from submitting a revised script till next semester.

    iv.   Level 3: Similarities above 60% -Such student registration for that programme shall be cancelled.

22. Grading System:

a. At the end of all evaluation components based on the performance of the student, each student is awarded based on *absolute grading system*. The list of absolute grades and its connotation are given below:

Grade	Grade Points	Percentage of Marks
O (Outstanding)	10	90 - 100
A+ (Excellent)	9	80 - 89
A (Very Good)	8	70 - 79
B+ (Good)	7	60 - 69
B (Above Average)	6	50 - 59
C (Average)	5	46 - 49
P (Pass)	4	40 - 45
F (Fail)	0	0 – 39
Ab (Absent)	0	Absent

b. The SGPA is the ratio of sum of the product of the number of credit s with the grade points scored by a student in all the courses and the sum of the number of credits of all the courses undergone by a student, in a semester.

i.e SGPA $(S_i) = \sum(C_i \times G_i) / \sum C_i$

where *'C_i'* is the number of credits of the ith course and *'G_i'* is the grade point scored by the student in the ith course.

c. The CGPA is also calculated in the same manner taking into account all the courses undergone by a student over all the semesters of a program,

i.e. CGPA $= \sum(C_i \times S_i) / \sum C_i$

where 'S'$_i$ is the SGPA of the ith semester and *'C_i'* is the total number of credits in that semester.

d. The SGPA and CGPA shall be rounded off to 2 decimal points and reported in the transcripts.

e. CGPA can be converted to percentage of marks : 10 X CGPA - 7.5

f. A student get in less than 40% of overall score and 40% in the semester end examination will be considered to have earned "F" grade. Combined Theory and Lab courses the student should get independently 40% in both theory and lab components else treated as failed in both. A student who obtains 'F' grade has to reappear for all the components of Semester End examination.

g. Audit/Certificate courses are graded as satisfactory or non-satisfactory only.

At the end of each semester, the Department of Online Learning/ Examination shall issue grade sheet indicating the SGPA and CGPA of the student. However, grade sheet will not be issued to the student if he/she has any outstanding dues.

23. Program Structure and Credit allocation:

- The Program Structure of the online programs shall be as approved by the Statutory Authority of the University and shall be same as that of corresponding on campus program
- The Credit Allocation shall be as per approved Program Structure.