Definition of Regular and Substantive Interaction
for Distance Education Courses
(Formerly referred to as regular and effective contact)

Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) initiated by instructors increases student engagement and student success. In addition, RSI distinguishes online courses from correspondence courses.

Part 1: Regulatory Context

To maintain accreditation and provide our students with opportunities for financial aid, we must adhere to the federal and state guidelines regarding regular and substantive interaction which include establishing, maintaining, and upholding a local definition. According to these standards both students and faculty must establish and maintain presence.

The US Department of Education § 600.2 defines substantive interaction as "engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at *least two of the following*-

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

Furthermore, an "institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency –

- (i) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
- (ii) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon requests by the student."

California Ed Code 5 CCR § 55204, states that "district governing boards shall ensure that:

- (a) Any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular effective contact between instructor and students, and among students, either synchronously or asynchronously, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities. Regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter pursuant to sections 53200 et seq.
- (b) Any portion of a course provided through distance education is conducted consistent with guidelines issued by the Chancellor pursuant to section 409 of the Procedures and Standing Orders of the Board of Governors."

Part 2: Definition of Regular and Substantive Interaction

In compliance with the US Department of Ed, updates to Title 5, ACCJC, AP 4105, and the *Agreement*, the Committee on Online Learning (COOL) recommends the following definition of regular and substantive interaction be adopted by Foothill College.

Once adopted the institutional definition will be disseminated to all faculty, incorporated into training and review materials, integrated into the Simple Syllabus template, *Online Faculty Handbook*, and the *Distance Education Strategic Plan*.

Regular & Substantive Interaction:
Documented instructor-initiated individualized interaction between instructors and students at regular weekly intervals in a predictable manner about the course content.

Instructors provide substantive interactions with students on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course. Instructors monitor the students' academic engagement and success.

Instructors are responsible for proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the students when needed, on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by a student.

Part 3: Courses in which Regular & Substantive Interaction Applies

Regular and substantive interaction is required in any course in which a portion of instructional hours are scheduled to occur in a distance education format, either synchronously or asynchronously. For example, if a 4-unit course is scheduled to occur 3-hours in-person and 1-hour online per week, RSI applies to the 1-hour of online instruction per week.

Appendix

Regular:
Predictable, scheduled, and documented instructor-initiated interactions with students about the course content.

Timely:
Timely responses to email and inbox messages within 2-3 business days
Timely feedback on regular assignments **within the length of time in which you have communicated to students in the syllabus.**
Punctual to Zoom meetings for synchronous class or Zoom office hours.
        Link to Zoom office hours posted in the syllabus.

Substantive:
The preponderance of interaction is focused on the course content.

Examples of Evidence of Regular & Substantive Interaction:
Instructors may document a variety of combinations of the below examples of dynamic synchronous and asynchronous interactions to demonstrate regular and substantive interaction. The interaction must be documented, instructor initiated, about the course content, and allow students to opportunities to interact with the instructor in regular and predictable ways.

Specific examples of ways to satisfy RSI:

Course Delivery:

- Welcome message,
- The syllabus,
- Announcements about the content that allow for student comments,
- Weekly announcements explaining, previewing, summarizing, and/or clarifying content,
- Video introducing each module content,
- Interactive video lectures,
- Release of weekly module content,
- Regular deadlines throughout the quarter for assignments and other student participation,
- Workshops, field trips, conventions, or event contact,
- Instructor participation in discussion boards,
- Student feedback in gradebook,
- Review sessions,
- Interactive podcasts on content that are reactive and or timely,
- Rubrics,
- Internships, externships, service-learning activities guided by instructor,
- Social networking related to course content.

Instructor-initiated timely communications with students, such as:
- Direct email, Canvas inbox, or instant messaging regarding coursework,
- Telephone contact about course content or assignments,
- Individual meetings to discuss course content and or assignments,
- Instructor-initiated discussions with personalized, specific, timely feedback,
- Regular scheduled office hours, tutoring sessions, online review sessions,
- Instructor-initiated Canvas inbox check-ins about course content, additional guidance,
- Meeting for assignment support,
- Regular check-ins regarding internships or externships,
- Regular check-ins regarding service-learning activities,
- Q&As about course content.

Individualized personalized, specific, timely feedback on assignments or assessments to clarify content knowledge, such as:
- Discussion boards
- Quizzes or exams
- Portfolio or project
- Muddiest point
- Self-reflections
- Blogs or wikis
- Other assignments

Are you unsure if it satisfies RSI, ask these six questions:
1. Instructor initiated?
2. Content specific?
3. Can students interact with it?
4. Is it regular and predictable?
5. Is it documented?

6. Must both the student and I be present for it to occur?[1]

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[1] Presence is what distinguishes our courses from correspondence courses. A correspondence course is one in which the instructor sends course materials to the students to complete at their own pace with little to no interaction between student and instructor. Correspondence courses are not eligible for government funding, such as student financial aid. To learn more: https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook/2020-2021/vol2/ch2-program-eligibility-written-arrangements-and-distance-education