[2.] RCCD Guide to Recommended Best Practices to Achieve Regular and Effective/Substantive Contact in Distance Education

Introduction

Regular and effective/substantive contact, as described in the accompanying [1.] *Summary of Regulations* document, is required as outlined in those regulations for in all course sections taught using Distance Education (DE) within the Riverside Community College District, that is, any course section where "seat time" is replaced by other forms of contact with students, including completely online and hybrid course sections. The tools described below represent examples of practices compiled by DE faculty at all three colleges that achieve regular and effective contact. Faculty are encouraged to share with each other new best practices as they develop in the future from available technologies.

RCCD recommends that DE instructors use the ideas contained here, or others that are similar, to initiate and sustain contact with students, being mindful that all course materials must be ADA, section 508, compliant and pre-certified by the district through the curriculum approval process as being accessible to all students, including closed-captioning on video content, where appropriate, and other compliance requirements.

This best practices document was developed through collaboration with the District Curriculum Committee, the College Curriculum Committees, among other groups, including the RCCD Online Advisory Committee, college distance education committees, administrators, and Open Campus personnel.

The responsibility for constructing, maintaining and updating this list of best practices resides with the college curriculum committees, each a standing committee of the college Academic Senate. The college curriculum committees will review this document regularly and make recommendations to the Academic Senate as significant changes are required. The college curriculum committee is also responsible for assuring the public that the "same standards of course quality [are] applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses…" *from Title 5 §55202.*

Just a reminder: **"Correspondence Education is not Distance Education."**
In Correspondence Education, the institution provides instructional materials by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials to students who are separated from the instructor, and the following conditions also exist: (1) Interaction between the instructor and the students is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (2) The course is self-paced.

RCCD Guide to Recommended Best Practices in Distance Education (DE)

Definitions of Terms

Definition: Instructor-Initiated Interactions:
Unlike correspondence education, in which students are responsible for initiating contact with the instructor, instructors using DE are required to actively initiate interaction with their students as a group and individually.

Definition: Frequent and Timely, i.e., Regular Contact/Interactions:
The measure of "regular contact" is based on a standard that is at least the same as it would be in a traditional face-to-face class. Instructors may exceed this minimum at their

discretion. The number of asynchronous or synchronous hours that an instructor is available to students enrolled in a DE class must be at least equal to the number of hours of availability as required for face-to-face classes of the same courses.

Instructor contact with DE students is understood as distributed over the course of the "instructional week" (seven days) and the term of the course (expressed in weeks). Instructor-initiated contact will occur as often as appropriate for regular contact, as defined by regulation.

Definition: Effective/Substantive Contact/Interactions:

Effective/substantive contact with students and delivery of course content includes instructor interaction with the entire group of students in the course section based on a well-defined schedule of availability, deadlines, feedback, and exchanges that are included in the instructor's Syllabus. Instructors define their schedules in the Syllabus and in other appropriate locations within the course management system.

Course sections taught using DE are considered the virtual equivalent of face-to-face classes, although many online or hybrid course sections may exceed the minimum requirements of the Course Outline of Record (COR) with effective use of current technologies inherent in the mode of delivery. Based on the notion that "a student cannot hide in the back of the room" in an online or hybrid class, effective/substantive contact between students and the instructor is, in many cases, more likely in an online class than in a traditional lecture room.

Examples of Recommended Best Practices for Achieving Regular Contact (Interaction) for Distance Education Course Sections

Note from the DCC: This list of Best Practices should be reviewed carefully and edited in the initial review process.

Means of achieving "regular" contact include, but are not limited to:
- Threaded discussion forums with regular and appropriate instructor participation based on course topics and specific content of the course addressed to all students and/or to individuals publicly.
- E-mail and/or messages within the course management system.
- Regular "Announcements" posted in the class.
- Regular deadlines, distributed throughout the term of the course, for assignments and other student participation.
- Regular, timely, appropriate feedback and evaluations of student work.
- Virtual online office hours in real time, such as chat, during announced periods of time, and/or asynchronously during announced days and hours.
- Instructor-prepared online e-lectures, podcasts or other forms of addressing course content and topics, presented in an appropriate format for the subject, such as written documents, audio and/or video files, and/or introductions and explanations for any publisher created materials (written, audio and/or video, etc.) that, combined with other course materials, creates the "virtual equivalent" of the face-to-face class.
- Instructor-prepared Syllabus, specific to each distance education course section, to document how regular contact between the students and the instructor is achieved.
- Guidelines for frequency of contact at least equivalent to contact in face-to-face

classrooms.
- Defined response time for student questions and assignment feedback.
- Establishing an active presence in the class.
- Frequent and substantive feedback throughout the course.
- Course policies defining regarding student-initiated contact, such as, where to post questions certain types of questions, in the instructor's Syllabus.
- Assignments and assessment deadlines that are spread throughout the term of the class.

In Case of Interrupted, Regular Contact:

Interruptions in instructor contact as defined by the instructor's Syllabus (such as illness or an emergency that takes the instructor offline) require notification to students via class announcement, email, and/or Discussion Board, or another course tool, stating the duration of the interruption. In the event that "regular" contact cannot be resumed according to the definitions of regular contact on the Syllabus, the Dean of Instruction should be notified.

Examples of Recommended Best Practices for Achieving Effective/Substantive Contact (Interaction) in Distance Education Course Sections

Means of achieving "effective/substantive contact" include, but are not limited to:
- Instructor-guided introductions, especially at the beginning of the class, or at important intervals.
- Daily or weekly assignments and projects that promote collaboration among students.
- Questions posed on the discussion board that encourage critical thinking skills and promote interaction among all course participants.
- Regular participation by the instructor in discussion activities with students, perhaps to provide a summary, to correct errors of fact, to keep the discussion on topic, and/or to add expertise to the content of the discussion.
- Monitoring student interaction and activity to ensure that they participate fully.
- Create a specific forum for questions regarding course content.
- Asking students for feedback about the course on a regular basis and revising the content as needed to address issues identified.
- Varied types of interaction, such as instructor-student, student-student, student-content, and student-instructor, and other interaction between and among the students and the instructor as part of the course design.

Other Suggested Options for Communications with Students

1. **Optional Synchronous Interaction**
   By utilizing available technologies, such as Blackboard Collaborate or CCC Confer, DE instructors can maximize face-to-face, synchronous interaction with students, if needed, to achieve the objectives of the course. CCC Confer is a web conferencing tool that is free to the California Community College System (http://www.cccconfer.org). Contact your college Instructional Media Center for assistance with implementing this technology. Contact Open Campus for assistance with implementing Blackboard Collaborate.

2. Examples of vital or essential Standards of Regular, Effective/Substantive Contract within a Course (these are all suggestion for the *type* of information that make expectations clear):

Regular Contact:
Example of an email statement indicating an estimated time for response to student emails:
 "Your instructor will respond to emails within 48 hours. Emails received after noon on Friday will not be responded to until Monday morning"

Example of a feedback expectation statement:
"Assignments are due on Sunday night at 10 pm. Your instructor will begin grading them on Monday and all grades will be posted by Wednesday evening"

Example of a discussion board post expectation:
"Your instructor will respond to discussion board questions within 48 hours. Questions posted after Friday at 12 pm will not be responded to until Monday morning."

Effective/Substantive Contact:
Example of an email statement to correct an error of fact or comprehension:
"The point you made in the last discussion post was accurate, but the dates of the conflict were slightly later, perhaps around 1776. Read the earlier posts of the first group to get a better sense of the issues surrounding the conflict and the time period required for completion of the war."

RCCD Guide to Recommended Best Practices to Achieve Regular and Substantive Contact in Distance Education

Introduction

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RCCD recommends that DE instructors use the ideas contained here, or others that are similar, to initiate and sustain contact with students, being mindful that all course materials must be ADA, section 508, compliant and pre-certified by the district through the curriculum approval process as being accessible to all students, including closed-captioning on video content, where appropriate, and other compliance requirements.

This best practices document was developed through collaboration with the College Distance Education Committees, the District Curriculum Committee, the College Curriculum Committees, administrators, and Distance Education personnel.

The responsibility for constructing, maintaining and updating this list of best practices resides with the colleges' Distance Education Committees and College Curriculum Committees, which report to the colleges' Academic Senates. These committees will review this document regularly and make recommendations to the Academic Senate as significant changes are required. The colleges' Curriculum Committees are also responsible for assuring the public that the "same standards of course quality [are] applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses…" *from Title 5 §55202*.

Just a reminder: **"Correspondence Education is not Distance Education."**
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Definitions of Terms

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The measure of "regular contact" is based on a standard that is at least the same as it would be in a traditional face-to-face class. Instructors may exceed this minimum at their

discretion. The number of asynchronous or synchronous hours that an instructor is available to students enrolled in a DE class must be at least equal to the number of hours of availability as required for face-to-face classes of the same courses.

Instructor contact with DE students is understood as distributed over the course of the "instructional week" and the term of the course (expressed in weeks). Instructor-initiated contact will occur as often as appropriate for regular contact, as defined by regulation.

Definition: Substantive Contact/Interactions:

Substantive contact with students and delivery of course content includes instructor interaction with the entire group of students in the course section based on a well-defined schedule of availability, deadlines, feedback, and exchanges that are included in the instructor's Syllabus. Instructors define their schedules in the Syllabus and in other appropriate locations within the course management system.

Course sections taught using DE are considered the virtual equivalent of face-to-face classes, although many online or hybrid course sections may exceed the minimum requirements of the Course Outline of Record (COR) with effective use of current technologies inherent in the mode of delivery. Based on the notion that "a student cannot hide in the back of the room" in an online or hybrid class, substantive contact between students and the instructor is, in many cases, more likely in an online class than in a traditional lecture room.

Examples of Recommended Best Practices for Achieving Regular Contact (Interaction) for Distance Education Course Sections

Means of achieving "regular" contact include, but are not limited to:

- Faculty presence, guidance, and initiation of contact (e.g, email to students with attached syllabus prior to 1st day of classes).
- The flow, sequence, and deadlines of the course are directed by the instructor and the timing of the course set through use of learning activities, online discussion, and/or lectures.
- Interaction with students happens fairly frequently and students grow to expect it.
- Announcements in Canvas at strategic points in the course by the instructor concerning course assignments and additional guidance.
- Notice to students of instructor absence from class and information on when regular interaction will resume.
- Assignments and assessment deadlines are spread throughout the term of the class.

In Case of Interrupted, Regular Contact:

Interruptions in instructor contact as defined by the instructor's Syllabus (such as illness or an emergency that takes the instructor offline) require notification to students via class announcement, email, and/or Discussion Board, or another course tool, stating the duration of the interruption. In the event that "regular" contact cannot be resumed according to the definitions of regular contact on the Syllabus, the Department Chair should be notified. In the absence of the Department Chair, the instructor should notify their Dean of Instruction.

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Examples of Recommended Best Practices for Achieving Substantive Contact (Interaction) in Distance Education Course Sections
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Faculty teaching in the online environment should be using varied ways of interacting with their students. Embracing the tenets of universal design as an approach to ensure that educational programs serve all students, this Guide considers a wide range of strategies to provide an inclusive environment for all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and disability status. To this end, instructors will use **more than one** method to maintain substantive contact with students and will outline their methods of choice in their syllabus.

Means of achieving "substantive contact" include, but are not limited to:

- Follow-up questions on a discussion board to assist students in reaching a higher learning potential.
- Timely, personalized feedback on assignments, discussions and/or quizzes (through comments in the Canvas gradebook, on discussion forum rubrics, or in Turnitin comments), that guide students to further knowledge and skills.
  - Feedback on student assignments should identify specifically what has been done correctly, needs improvement, or guides students to the next steps of learning. Brief comments like "good job" or "you need to improve" are not substantive, nor are generic rubric categories without additional comments.
- Course materials (e.g., recorded webinars, videos, and reading materials) which facilitate synchronous or asynchronous interactions and require the student to contact the instructor or participate in an online discussion moderated by the instructor.
- Instructor announcements to the class regarding course content and upcoming assignments.
- Synchronous online meetings and chats that further explore course material and answer student questions.

Other Suggested Options for Communications with Students

1. **Synchronous Interaction**
   By utilizing available technologies, such as ConferZoom, Canvas chat, and Canvas Conferences, DE instructors can maximize face-to-face, synchronous interaction with students, if needed, to achieve the objectives of the course.

2. Examples of vital or essential Standards of Regular, Effective/Substantive Contract within a Course (these are all suggestion for the *type* of information that make expectations clear):

Regular Contact:
Example of an announcement/syllabus item indicating an estimated time for response to student emails: "Your instructor will respond to emails within 48 hours. Emails received after noon on Friday will not be responded to until Monday morning".

Example of a feedback expectation statement:
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Example of a discussion board statement to correct an error of fact or comprehension:
"The point you made in the last discussion post was accurate, but the dates of the conflict were slightly later, perhaps around 1776. Check out earlier posts of the first group that give a good sense of the issues surrounding the conflict and the time period required for completion of the war."