

Hello, Fall DE Faculty-

All colleges in the Riverside Community College District will be visited in Spring 2020 by peer teams, organized by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). The purpose of these visits is to encourage our colleges to “improve academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and, ultimately, student success” ([ACCJC website](#), 2019). The goal of this correspondence is to inform you of the processes that will be used by a visiting team to review Distance Education (DE) courses at the colleges and to help you prepare to demonstrate that you are having regular and substantive contact with students in your DE (hybrid and online) courses.

In preparation for these visits, DE faculty should be aware that the peer review team will “observe” a randomly selected cadre of DE classes from the Fall 2019 semester. The team will assign one or two team members to review an archive of 10% of the total number of distance education sections offered during the Fall semester. The peer reviewers will be looking at archived sections for evidence of “regular and substantive” interaction throughout the full semester, without interfering with instruction or course design. It is important to note that the peer review team will maintain confidentiality of student and instructor information throughout the observations, and the written report will be an aggregate of findings. **The teams’ observations of DE courses will not be used for evaluative purposes by Administration within the District.** Please see the attached Appendix H from ACCJC’s Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement and Peer Review for the full discussion of the rationale and process for DE course observations.

To help you prepare your courses for the team visit, some examples are listed in the following paragraphs.

**Regular contact** includes:

- Faculty presence, guidance, and initiation of contact.
- 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.

Methods for 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 (ex. 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.

When developing Fall classes, DE faculty should be mindful that peer reviewers are allowed full access to courses in order to observe all facets of instructor interactions with students. They will be “observing” discussion boards, announcements, and gradebooks (including rubrics and instructor feedback), to confirm that instructors are regularly interacting with

students in the course and that these interactions are considerable and meaningful. **Because instructor-to-student interaction via Canvas email is not able to be archived, we urge you to archive your emails in Outlook if you would like them to be used as evidence of substantive contact with students.**

Summer workshops on using Canvas tools for regular and substantive interaction will be held at all three colleges, and Distance Education support staff will be available online to assist you in preparing your Fall courses. In addition, other online materials are available in the DE Instructors' Resource course in Canvas and in an upcoming DE newsletter. Please take advantage of these opportunities to build in structures that will provide the types of interactions that are intended to support students' retention and success in DE courses.

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