



## Online Instruction Guidelines for Regular and Substantive Interaction & Regular and Effective Contact<sup>i,ii</sup>

---

### Part 1: Overview

#### 1.1 Purpose

The Guidelines establish minimum instructor contact with online students in credit-bearing courses, including military and contract education. The Guidelines do not apply to cable, one-way text, telecourse, hybrid, web-enhanced, and conventional onsite courses. Beyond the baseline instructor-initiated interactions described herein, effective and exemplary contact are further detailed in Coastline's separate Academic Quality Rubric.

#### 1.2 Principles

Online courses are the equivalent of onsite classes in rigor, quality, and duration of instructor-student interactions. Interactions must be demonstrable and documented. A course's required regular and substantive interactions and regular and effective contacts are codified in the Distance Education Addendum attached to its Course Outline of Record, that having been approved by the Curriculum Committee. An online course aligns with its approved SLOs and employs multiple assessment measures.<sup>iii</sup> An instructor using a third-party or publisher's website is equally subject to these Guidelines. Said instructor will load a syllabus and orientation module into the course's college-hosted LMS shell communicating how the instructor-student interactions required in sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 will transpire in the publisher's site.

As factored in the District's *Agreement*, large lectures necessitate a commensurate increase in instructor-student interactions beyond these baselines.

#### 1.3 Procedures

Instructors observe district, state, and federal attendance and census verification policies. A Substantive Change Report will be filed if more than 50% of a program is moved online. If an instructor becomes absent or unable to teach, the instructor or supervisor will notify students immediately by an announcement, email, message, or phone. If the absence is longer than a week, a substitute will replace the instructor of record. Per the District's *AP 3710*, online course content abides by and is protected under copyright and intellectual property laws.

#### 1.4 Training and verification

Before teaching an online course, an instructor must undergo the online course quality, design, and pedagogy training offered by Coastline's Faculty Success Center (FSC). Committed to continuous improvement, instructors keep abreast of online best practices through ongoing professional development. Adherence to the Guidelines is verified by FSC reviews and by the formal evaluations established in the *Agreement*.

---

## Part 2: How are RSI and REC defined?

Coastline's guiding principle is that online courses entail the same weekly instructional time, rigor, and quality of interaction as do site-based courses.

### 2.1 Establishing expectations

Syllabuses declare class policies for online student conduct, including netiquette, performance, work quality, academic honesty, and timeliness. Syllabuses establish measures ensuring students' regular virtual attendance and participation in academic activities. Syllabuses also certify instructors' expectations for themselves: grading standards (may be exemplified in rubrics and models), late work policy, dropping No Shows and inactive students, types of online interactions, frequency and nature of instructor participation in discussions, depth of feedback, and whether feedback will be public or private.

Furthermore, syllabuses explicitly state turnaround time for evaluating assignments (homework, quizzes, exams, essays, projects, discussions, etc.), e.g., "I will grade your assignments within five days after they are due." An instructor's response time to students' queries will also be stated, e.g., "From Monday to Friday I will respond to your emails, messages, and Q&A posts within twenty-four hours. On Monday I will respond to your questions from the weekend."

### 2.2 Defining substantive and effective

"Substantive" and "effective" mean that an instructor's feedback is academic rather than administrative only. Online instructors initiate scholarly dialogue with individual students. Examples of substantive and effective contact include personalized, scholarly, discipline-specific feedback (as opposed to generic praise) on a student's particular strengths and weaknesses, critical reasoning, argumentation, approach to a problem, organization, and grammar and may include citations, links, articles, research, and other academic content. Separately, an instructor also facilitates distance learning and community-building by requiring student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions. Necessary yet non-RSI and non-REC interactions include motivational contact and administrative reminders.

### 2.3 Defining regular

Instructors commit to interacting weekly with online students for a duration equivalent to onsite classes. Every week instructors interact substantively and personally with online students through some of the activities described in section 3.1 (e.g., academic or problem-solving discussion boards, video conferences, synchronous or asynchronous Q&A). Instructors send class-wide announcements, emails, or messages weekly at a minimum. Instructors also maintain regular deadlines and due dates.

---

## Part 3: Which interactions are substantive?

### 3.1 Substantive interactions

When initiating weekly contact with students, instructors use a variety of activities and multiple assessment measures to accommodate different learning styles. Interactions are demonstrable and documented. In accord with the definitions of RSI and REC in sections 2.2 and 2.3, the following dynamic synchronous or asynchronous interactions, provided they are academic, qualify as substantive:

- Announcements that are academic, timely, and reactive
- Chat rooms when instructor dialogues actively with students
- Discussion board replies that are academic
- E-mails
- Feedback that is academic and personalized on student blogs, wikis, quizzes, papers, portfolios, exams, and other assignments
- Field trips guided by instructor
- Instant Messaging
- Office hours when instructor meets with student(s)
- Phone calls
- Private messages
- Q&As about academic content
- Review sessions
- Rubrics
- Social networking
- Video conferences when instructor meets with student(s)
- Webcasts, webinars, podcasts, and recordings that are timely, customized, and reactive

### 3.2 Non-interactive content deliveries

The following content deliveries are often essential to quality instruction and the student's learning experience but do not qualify as substantive interactions:

- Announcements, emails, and messages that are administrative or non-academic
- Course orientations
- Databases
- Discussion board posts with non-academic or administrative content such as generic praise or clarifications of class policies
- Internet resources and links to external sites
- Modules, materials, lessons, lectures, and presentations that are pre-loaded
- Webcasts, webinars, podcasts, and other audio/video recordings that are generic, impersonal, passive, or non-timely

---

## Part 4: What are the regulatory bases for the Guidelines?

### 4.1 U.S. Department of Education

*Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Subpart A, §602.3* establishes that correspondence courses do not qualify for Title IV federal financial aid, and that Distance Education is distinct from Correspondence Education (2015, p. 12):

#### DISTANCE EDUCATION

Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed . . . to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include:

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conferencing; or
4. Video cassettes, DVDs, and CDROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in . . . (1) through (3) of this definition.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

1. Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor.

2. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
3. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.
4. Correspondence education is not distance education.

### 4.2 California Department of Education

In §55204, Instructor Contact, the *California Community Colleges Distance Education California Code of Regulations, Title 5 and Related Guidelines* states, “In addition to the requirements of section 55002 and any locally established requirements applicable to all courses, district governing boards shall ensure that . . . [a]ny portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular effective contact between instructor and students” (2008, p. 6). Section 55204 further stresses that the online instructor must regularly initiate contact with students to ascertain their activity and progress.

### 4.3 ACCJC

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges’ *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* states, “Distance education is defined, for the purpose of accreditation review, as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which support regular and substantive interaction between the student and instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously” (2013, p. 2).

---

## Part 5: How do we authenticate student identity?

### 5.1 Security

Coastline's online instructors ensure the security and integrity of their quizzes and exams; thus, students may be required at the instructor's discretion to take exams in a sanctioned proctored setting. Students' privacy is protected under FERPA.

### 5.2 Identity authentication

The Coast Community College District's *AP 4105 Distance Education* procedure describes how students enrolled in Coastline's online courses will be authenticated by the District:

Consistent with federal regulations pertaining to federal financial aid

eligibility, the District must authenticate or verify that the student who registers in a distance education course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The District will provide to each student at the time of registration a statement of the process in place to protect student privacy. The District shall utilize secure credentialing/login and password to authenticate or verify the student's identity. (2016, p. 2)

---

## Part 6: Are our online courses accessible?

### 6.1 ADA, 508, 11135

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 508, and the California Government Code Section 11135 require that a community college's development, procurement, maintenance, and use of electronic or information technology be accessible to persons with disabilities. The Coast Community College District's *AP 4105 Distance Education* warrants that Coastline's online courses comply with these laws:

Instructional materials and textbooks permit maximum opportunity for access by students with documented disabilities without the need for outside assistance (i.e., sign language interpreters, aides, or other forms of human assistance). Distance education resources provide "built-in" accommodation where possible (i.e., closed captioning or descriptive narration) and/or interface design/content layout that is accessible to "industry standard" assistive technology in common use by persons with disabilities. Alternative testing format and extended test-taking time are provided, which address the student's documented disability and

impact on his or her academic performance. (2016, p. 4)

### 6.2 Accessibility training

The college and instructors are responsible for ensuring that online courses are accessible. The college provides online instructors with up-to-date accessibility resources. Furthermore, online instructors are trained to understand and adopt accessibility standards, which are verified during the FSC's reviews of online courses.

### 6.3 Accessible content

Per *AP 4105*, instructors' textbooks, media, other materials, and communications tools will ensure equitable learning opportunities for distance education students with disabilities. Online instructors also make their course content accessible with captions, alternative text tags for images, written descriptions, and user interfaces compliant with state and federal accessibility requirements. Courses will be designed with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) in mind to ensure course navigation ease, appropriate use of color, cogent tables, and universal, non-restrictive technological accessibility such as that provided by the .pdf format.

---

## Part 7: References

- Agreement between Coast Federation of Educators American Federation of Teachers Local 1911 and Coast Colleges* [PDF document]. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.cccd.edu/employees/resources/Documents//CFE%202011-12%20CONTRACT.pdf>
- Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. (2015). *Regular and Effective Contact* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [www.asccc.org/sites/default/files/REC-2015-Accred.ppt](http://www.asccc.org/sites/default/files/REC-2015-Accred.ppt)
- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. (2013). *Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [http://www.accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Guide\\_to\\_Evaluating\\_DE\\_and\\_CE\\_2013.pdf](http://www.accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Guide_to_Evaluating_DE_and_CE_2013.pdf)
- Cabrillo College. (2015). *Distance Education Faculty Handbook* [PDF document]. (Creative Commons License). Retrieved from [http://www.cabrillo.edu/services/tlc/docs/Cabrillo\\_DE\\_Faculty\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.cabrillo.edu/services/tlc/docs/Cabrillo_DE_Faculty_Handbook.pdf)
- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2008). *Distance Education Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 5 and Related Guidelines §55202 – 55206* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/de\\_guidelines\\_081408.pdf](http://extranet.cccco.edu/Portals/1/AA/DE/de_guidelines_081408.pdf)
- Coast Community College District Administrative Procedure. (2013). *AP 3710 Securing of Copyright* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [http://www.cccd.edu/boardoftrustees/BoardPolicies/Documents/General\\_Institution/AP\\_3710\\_Securing\\_of\\_Copyright.pdf#search=intellectual%20property](http://www.cccd.edu/boardoftrustees/BoardPolicies/Documents/General_Institution/AP_3710_Securing_of_Copyright.pdf#search=intellectual%20property)
- Coast Community College District Administrative Procedure. (2016 draft). *AP 4105 Distance Education* [PDF document]. Upon approval can be retrieved from <http://www.cccd.edu/boardoftrustees/BoardPolicies/Pages/Academic-Affairs.aspx>
- Coastline Community College. (2012). *Academic Quality Rubric* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www2.coastline.edu/files/AcademicQualityRubric.pdf>
- Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Subpart A, §602.3.* (2015). Governs the U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from [http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d78bba28986df8cb445de7a30c13120d&mc=true&node=pt34.3.602&rgn=div5#se34.3.602\\_13](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d78bba28986df8cb445de7a30c13120d&mc=true&node=pt34.3.602&rgn=div5#se34.3.602_13)
- Folsom Lake College. (2013). *Guidelines for Online, Hybrid and Web-Enhanced Instruction* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [http://media.scc.losrios.edu/de/committee/FLC\\_guidelines\\_online\\_hybrid\\_web-based\\_instruction-2013.pdf](http://media.scc.losrios.edu/de/committee/FLC_guidelines_online_hybrid_web-based_instruction-2013.pdf)
- Foothill College. (n.d.). *Online Faculty Responsibilities*. Retrieved from [http://www.foothill.edu/fga/faculty\\_responsibilities.php](http://www.foothill.edu/fga/faculty_responsibilities.php)
- Luther Rice College and Seminary. (2015). *Guide to Regular and Substantive Interaction in Distance Education* [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.tracs.org/documents/McCannJeff-GuidetoRegularandSubstantiveInteractioninDistanceEducation.pdf>
- Riverside Community College District. (2013). *Guide to Best Practices Regarding Regular, Effective/Substantive Contact in Distance Education* [PDF document]. Retrieved from [http://mvcsp.com/accreditation/Evidence/Evidence/Guide%20to%20Best%20Practices\\_DE\\_10\\_28\\_2013%20\(1\).pdf](http://mvcsp.com/accreditation/Evidence/Evidence/Guide%20to%20Best%20Practices_DE_10_28_2013%20(1).pdf)

---

## Part 8: Appendix

### 8.1 Acronyms and abbreviations

| Term             | Definition   |
|------------------|--|
| ACCJC            | Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges   |
| ADA              | Americans with Disabilities Act  |
| <i>Agreement</i> | <i>Agreement between Coast Federation of Educators American Federation of Teachers Local 1911 and Coast Colleges</i> |
| AP               | Administrative Procedure   |
| CCCD             | Coast Community College District   |
| COR              | Course Outline of Record   |
| DE               | Distance Education   |
| DoE              | U.S. Department of Education   |
| FERPA            | Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act  |
| FSC              | Coastline's Faculty Success Center   |
| LMS              | Learning Management System   |
| REC              | Regular and Effective Contact per ACCJC  |
| RSI              | Regular and Substantive Interaction per DoE  |
| SLO              | Student Learning Outcome   |
| WCAG             | Web Content Accessibility Guidelines   |

### 8.2 Endnotes

---



<sup>i</sup> This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License.

<sup>ii</sup> The Guidelines were ratified by Coastline's Academic Senate on March 1, 2016, and take effect Summer 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> Acronyms and abbreviations are spelled out in Part 8: Appendix.