

College of the Redwoods
Distance Education
Regular Effective Contact

Endorsed by the Curriculum Committee-03/22/13

Approved by the Academic Senate-04/05/13

Ensuring **Regular Effective Instructor/Student Contact** guarantees that the student in an online or hybrid course receives the benefit of the instructor's presence in the learning environment both as a provider of instructional information and as a facilitator of student learning. In a face to face course the instructor is present at each class meeting and interacts with class announcements, lectures, activities and discussions. The instructor also serves as a content advisor when he or she answers questions both as they come up in class and as they arise in individual situations. These types of questions are dealt with via the telephone, email, or face to face office visits.

Title 5 regulations do not make a distinction between regular and distance education (DE) courses beyond the need to have a separate curriculum approval process and the need to ensure regular effective contact. Title 5 and the Distance Education Guidelines for the California Community Colleges require each community college to have a policy regarding regular effective contact between instructor and student including "the type and frequency of interaction appropriate to each DE course/section or session."

College of the Redwoods Policy:

All DE courses at CR, whether hybrid or fully online, will include regular effective contact as described below:

- **Initiated interaction:** Instructors will regularly initiate interaction with students and determine that they are accessing and comprehending course material and

participating regularly in the activities in the course. Providing students with an open ended question forum, although appropriate, does not constitute the entirety of effective instructor initiated interaction.

- **Frequency:** DE courses are considered the equivalent to face to face courses. Therefore, the frequency of the contact will be at least the same as would be established in a regular, face to face course. At the very least, the number of instructor contact hours per week that would be available for face to face students will also be available, in asynchronous and/or synchronous mode, for DE students. Contact shall be distributed in a manner that will ensure that regular contact is maintained, given the nature of asynchronous instructional methodologies, over the course of a week and should occur as often as is appropriate for the course.
- **Establishing expectations and managing unexpected instructor absence:** An instructor- and/or department-established policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor initiated contact and instructor feedback, will be posted in the syllabus and/or other course documents that are made available for students when the course officially opens each semester. If the instructor must be out of contact briefly for an unexpected reason (such as illness or a family emergency that takes the instructor offline), notification to students will be made in the announcements area of the course that includes when the students can expect regular effective contact to resume. If the offline time results in a lengthy absence (i.e. more than three or four days) a substitute instructor should be sought who can assist students while the instructor is unavailable.

Minimum Contact: Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all CR DE courses, instructors will, at a minimum, use the following resources to initiate contact with students:

- Threaded discussion forums (or equivalent) with appropriate instructor participation.
- General email/messages.
- Weekly announcements in the Learning Management System.
- Timely feedback for student work.
- Instructor-prepared materials (text-based, audio files, and/or video files), in addition to any publisher created materials (written, recorded, broadcast, etc.) that, combined with other course materials, creates the “virtual equivalent” of the face to face class.

Other Types of Contact: Instructors may also choose to use other forms of communication, as mentioned in Section 55204 of Title 5. (*“...through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, correspondence, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities.”*) and/or CCCConfer, video conference, pod cast, or other synchronous technologies may also be included. CCCConfer is a web conferencing tool that is free to the California Community College System.

It is suggested that instructors should have a threaded discussion that is set aside for general questions about the course and may wish to have weekly or other timely, question and answer sessions available to students. This may also be accomplished through virtual office hours.

Regulations: Title 5/Distance Education Guidelines for the California Community Colleges state:

55202. Course Quality Standards.

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses, in regard to the course quality judgment made pursuant to the requirements of section 55002, and in regard to any local course quality determination or review process. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 2 (commencing with section 53200) of chapter 2. **NOTE:** Authority cited: Section 66700 and 70901, Education Code. References: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code.

Guideline for Section 55202

This section emphasizes the extent to which course quality depends upon the full involvement of faculty in the design and application of DE courses. It discusses course quality standards for distance education and combines language formerly found in sections 55207 and 55209 which it replaces. Language is added to clarify that normal course quality standards apply to any portion of a course conducted through distance education.

55204. Instructor Contact.

In addition to the requirements of section 55002 and any locally established requirements applicable to all courses, district-governing boards shall ensure that: (a) All approved courses offered as distance education include *regular effective contact* between instructor and students, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, correspondence, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities. (b) All distance education courses are delivered consistent with guidelines issued by the Chancellor pursuant to section 409 of the Procedures and Standing Orders of the Board of Governors. *Regular effective contact* is an academic and professional matter pursuant to title 5, section 53200. **Note:** Authority cited: Sections 70901 and 66700, Education Code. Reference: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code.

Guideline for Section 55204.

This section defines what contact must be maintained between instructor and student: Subsection (a) stresses **the responsibility of the instructor in a DE course to initiate regular contact with enrolled students to verify their participation and performance status.** The use of the term “regular effective contact” in this context suggests that students should have frequent opportunities to ask questions and receive answers from the instructor of record. Subsection (b) establishes the principle that for DE courses, there are a number of acceptable interactions between instructor and student, not all of which may require in-person contact. Thus, districts will need to define “effective contact, **“including how often, and in what manner instructor-student interaction is achieved.”** It is important that districts document how regular effective contact is achieved. Since regular effective contact was declared an academic and professional matter, this documentation must include demonstration of collegial consultation with the academic senate, for example through its delegation to the local curriculum committee. A natural place for this to occur is during the separate course approval process. Documentation should consist of the inclusion of information in applicable outlines of record on the type and frequency of interaction appropriate to each DE course/section or session. Local policies should establish and monitor minimum standards of regular effective contact.

Resources:

College of the Desert, Distance Education Regular Effective Content Policy.
Mt. San Jacinto College, Regular Effective Contact Policy.
Mendocino College, Distance Education Procedures Regular Effective Contact

