

Distance Education Regular Effective Contact

Reference: *Title 5 §53200, 55002, 55202, 55204, 55206
Education Code §66700, 70901, 70902,
42 U.S.C. §12100 et seq., 29 U.S.C. §794d
Southwestern College Distance Education Handbook*

The Southwestern College Distance Education (DE) Handbook integrates federal, state, and accreditation laws, regulations, education code, and standards. In order to meet core quality standards, all sections of online courses (pursuant to College District Procedure 4105 AP) will include Regular and Effective Contact (also known as “regular and substantive interaction” by the US Department of Education) that is initiated by the instructor of record with students.

Southwestern College Distance Education Definition and Application

Southwestern College distance education is defined as instruction where students and faculty are separated by distance and interact using a variety of technologies. An online course at Southwestern College is a class instructed entirely online using the College District’s course management system. A hybrid course at Southwestern College is a class that offers instruction both online using the college’s course management system and face-to-face on campus.

Course Quality Standards

California Code of Regulations, Title 5 §55202 requires that the same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to the traditional face-to-face 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. At Southwestern College, faculty teaching online or hybrid courses are evaluated per the SCEA Contract.

Regular Effective Contact

Section 55204 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) Any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes 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, voicemail, e-mail, or other activities. Regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter pursuant to sections 53200 et seq.

Distance Education Regular Effective Contact

(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.

Definitions of Contact

Section 55204 Subdivision (a) stresses the responsibility of the instructor of an online or hybrid 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 also suggests that students should have frequent opportunities to ask questions and receive answers from the instructor of record.

The last published Distance Education Guidelines, March 2004, issued by the Chancellor pursuant to section 409 of the Procedures and Standing Orders of the Board of Governors, as referenced in subdivision (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, the College District will need to define "effective contact," including how often and in what manner instructor-student interaction is achieved.

Documentation of Regular Effective Contact Is Required

It is important to document regular effective contact and how it is achieved. The College District must have documentation available to demonstrate compliance in the case of an audit. Identification of methods to document regular effective contact first occurs during the separate course approval process (see section 55206). This begins with identifying acceptable methods of documenting the type and frequency of effective contact in the course outline of record. The majority of contact documentation is to be maintained in the Course Management System. During faculty evaluations, student surveys, and program review, the quality and type of documentation is reviewed.

Instructor-Initiated Contact

Instructors will regularly initiate interaction with students to determine that they are accessing and comprehending course material and that they are participating regularly in the activities of the course. Providing students with an instructor-facilitated forum to ask questions is recommended but does not constitute the entirety of instructor-initiated interaction.

Frequency

Online courses are considered the "virtual equivalent" to face-to-face courses. Therefore, the frequency of the contact will be at least the same as would be established in a 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 based on the Carnegie unit. A three-unit class requires three hours of

Distance Education Regular Effective Contact

faculty communication time. Faculty office hours are not included as fulfilling the regular effective contact requirement and are a separate requirement. Given the nature of asynchronous instructional methodologies, contact shall be distributed in a manner that will ensure regular contact is maintained over the course of every week.

Establishing Expectations and Managing Unexpected Instructor Absence

An instructor and/or department policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor-initiated contact and instructor feedback will be posted in the syllabus that is 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), students will be notified in the announcement area of the course; this announcement will include 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 of record is unavailable.

Type of Contact

Examples of regular effective contact include:

- Threaded discussions within the course management system, with appropriate instructor participation. (Question-and-answer forums are recommended but will be used in conjunction with other forums.)
- Weekly text, audio, or video announcements by instructor in the course management system
- Timely feedback on student work as described in the syllabus
- Instructor-created lecture materials (publisher materials may supplement but not replace instructor-created materials)
- Group or individual meetings, review sessions, and study sessions
- Orientations, field trips, library workshops, and other class events
- Contact by email, telephone, and chat
- Video conferencing with CCC Confer, Skype, or other synchronous technologies (CCC Confer is a web conferencing tool that is free to the California Community College System. <http://www.cccconfer.org>)

Distance Education Regular Effective Contact

Suggestions

- It is recommended that instructors have a threaded discussion forum set aside for general questions and conversations about the course. In addition, instructors may wish to hold weekly or monthly synchronous question-and-answer sessions for students. This may also be accomplished through virtual office hours.
- Instructors are encouraged to engage students with web 2.0 tools and applications such as, although not limited to, VoiceThread, Padlet, Twitter, Facebook, Tackk, Poll Everywhere, Doodle, Animoto, Prezi, Glogster, GoogleDocs, Wordle, and Bitstrips.
- A suggested approach for DE instructors to stay current with new and emerging technology is to subscribe to RSS feeds or follow on Twitter/Facebook organizations such as, although not limited to, WCET, @ONE for Training, Online Learning Consortium, Edudemic, MindShift, Online Teaching Conference, TED, and The Faculty Project.