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Regular Effective Contact Policy for Hybrid and Online Courses

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

55211. 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) (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 55211
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) honors 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 (see section 55213).
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. As
indicated in the *Guideline to Section 55219*, districts need to describe the type and quantity of
student-faculty interaction in their annual reports to their local governing boards and the State
Chancellor's Office.

Background:

In hybrid or fully online courses, ensuring **Regular Effective Instructor/Student Contact** guarantees that the student 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 via all class announcements, lectures, activities and discussions that take a variety of forms. For example, discussions can be held as part of a lecture format, group work scenarios, or content review sessions. 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.[1]

Title V regulations do not make a distinction between regular and distance education courses beyond the need to have a separate curriculum approval process and the need to ensure regular effective contact. Therefore, it is assumed that those qualities of regular effective contact described above for the face to face environment, should also be applied to the distance education situation. The DE Guidelines require colleges to develop a policy regarding regular effective contact that addresses "the type and frequency of interaction appropriate to each DE course/section or session".[1]

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[1] From MSJC Regular Effective Contact Policy written by Pat James-Hanz

Instructor Initiated Contact:

Instructors of Online and Hybrid courses will, at a minimum, demonstrate Regular Effective Contact in each CMC course through:

1. Including a discussion forum for students to ask content-related questions

      a. Forum should be clearly labeled

      b. Expectations for the amount of time a student will be required to wait for a response should be included in forum introduction

2. Completing content specific discussion forum activities

      a. Designed to solicit the level of student understanding

      b. Instructor should respond to each student's main posting and/or read each student's posting and provide summary comments on the discussion board

3. Posting regular announcements in the course, as appropriate

4. Providing regular feedback on student performance, equivalent to the length of time required for feedback in a brick-and-mortar course

5. Informing students of any expected or unexpected absence from the course

Other activities that demonstrate instructor initiated interaction include the use of chat rooms, e-mail, study sessions, and virtual meetings. Should these methods of interaction be preferred, faculty will be responsible for archiving such interaction.

Frequency of Contact:

Since hybrid and online courses are considered equivalent to brick-and-mortar courses, it is expected that instructors spend at least the number of hours in contact with students each week that they would have if the course was not a distance education course. In other words, if an 18-week, 3-unit course requires 3 hours of brick-and-mortar lecture, the online or hybrid instructor should spend a minimum three hours per week interacting with students. Given that there are many options for instructor-student interaction, the instructor should use their judgment in utilizing communication methods and frequency that meet the needs of as many students as possible or what is appropriate for the particular course content.