

Sample Communications about Regular and Substantive Interaction- Email from VPI

From: [Corey Marvin](#)
To: [CC FACULTY FULL](#); [cc adjunct](#)
Subject: Summer 2024 Semester Info, 3 of 5: Online Practices for Regular and Effective Contact
Date: Thursday, June 6, 2024 10:48:00 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

This is the third of the new semester's welcome back emails. This one is specifically for online instructors. **Any policy, practice, or information new to this semester is in RED.**

But first a reminder that online classes cannot be set up in part or in whole in a do-at-your-own-pace format. In meeting the state's definition of distance education, they must be designed like any other class with regular activities organized in terms of instructor interaction, a weekly assignment plan, and assessments periodically scheduled over the course of the semester.

Secondly, you must conduct your classes so that they include regular effective and substantive interaction between instructor and students. This is not just a best practice in the sense of it'd be great if you do it. It is a requirement for distance education courses at the federal level if the college is expecting its students to receive federal financial aid. And it is a regulatory requirement straight up in the state of California for any instruction offered by distance education—financial aid or not.

As the term itself suggests, the contact must be regular; it cannot be haphazard, intermittent, or left up to the student to initiate. It must be substantive in the sense that it does more than just direct students to a resource, remind them of a course policy, report a grade, or give a one-phrase reply to substantive assignments: it must show evidence of guiding students' understanding of course concepts and materials. And of course it must be between instructor and students.

A fourth item not explicitly stated in the language of the regulation but a clear consequence of it is that regular effective contact must be documentable. It doesn't count if we (the college) cannot show that it exists in your class.

Recently, a very important criterion was to the definition of regular and effective contact: contact *among students*. So as you review your regular and effective contact practices, give consideration to what extent students are regularly and effectively conversing with each other, discussing course concepts, collaborating on assignments, cooperating on projects, or whatever else qualifies as student-to-student contact, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

Several years ago the Cerro Coso Academic Senate approved a statement of regular and effective contact between faculty and students. That statement served as the basis for a procedure that is now part of Board Policy that specifically addresses regular effective contact (Administrative Procedure [AP 4105](#)). This statement was recently reviewed and reauthorized by the academic senate. The procedure says in part that any faculty member teaching an online or hybrid course shall do the following:

1. Respond to student questions, emails, and other communications within 48 hours, Saturdays, Sundays, non-instructional, and leave days excepted,
2. Regularly (at least twice a week) initiate contact with students in the online classroom,

3. Monitor student-to-student interaction in classroom activities requiring interaction,
4. Select and incorporate some combination of strategies to verify student identity and authenticate the originality of work,
5. Provide information to students regarding the items above on the class syllabus,
6. The faculty member teaching an online or hybrid course shall include all course syllabus information as described in the CCA contract within the District's adopted class management system and likewise shall conduct all forums, wikis, and other student-to-student class interactivity entirely within the class management system.

Below are some practices that do NOT fulfill the requirements of the administrative procedure, or of our accrediting agency's interpretation, or of the Chancellor's Office requirements for regular and substantive interaction:

- Telling your students to do the reading and assignments and contact you if they have questions - not regular, not effective.
- Grading that is entirely automatic, such as self-graded quizzes, exercises, and exams - not regular, not effective, not between the instructor and students. (While automatically graded assignments can be used as one very effective type of formative assessment in your course, they cannot be your only type.)
- Providing contact only two or three times a semester after big projects - not regular, not effective.
- Letting the publisher's website be the sole form of instruction and feedback - not between instructor and student.
- Having discussion forums where students only respond to other students - not between instructor and student.
- Having discussion forums or journaling activities where the instructor only responds to students - not between student and student. (Though this could be okay if you have another avenue through which students have regular and effective contact with each other—it doesn't have to be by discussion forum; but absent that, this set-up does not provide for interaction among students.)
- Using your phone, email, or text messaging as the predominant method of student feedback - could be regular, effective, and between instructor and student but it is not documentable. Note: sending an email to a student or calling on the phone is certainly appropriate at times and often the right way to respond in certain kinds of interaction—that option is never OFF the table. But such contact should be the exception rather than the rule. Documentable regular effective contact is expected to be a built-in part of the class . . . with any non-documented text or phone calls being over and above this baseline. **Over the past few semesters, more and more faculty are using apps embedded into the Canvas shell as an effective way to communicate with students within the course environment. These are completely okay.**

Of particular importance is item “e” of the administrative procedure, to clearly describe your practice and expectations regarding regular and substantive interaction *on your class syllabus*. This helps remove any doubt between you and your students about contact hours and methods, response time expectations, interaction format, and grading turn-around times. Your statement might also include how and when this contact is to take place, its effect on the overall course grade, and any scoring rubrics that are applicable. This clarity not only protects students but you as well in the case of a complaint.

If you have questions about whether your current practice meets the definition or not, how you might tailor something you do to come into compliance better, or even how to make your forums more effective because the last time you tried one, it didn’t work out very well—you have a variety of options. You can view the resources on the [Faculty 411 site](#), you can discuss it with your faculty chair or other department colleagues, or you can get guidance from your educational administrator or from the Distance Ed Office at 760-384-6115.

Thanks very much for helping us adhere to parameters we must operate under if we wish to continue to provide distance education options for students.

Corey

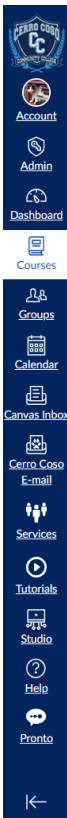


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Regular and Substantive Interaction

What Is It?

It has been a rule in distance education for many years now that if you are teaching in the online environment, you must conduct your classes so that they include regular and substantive interaction between instructor and students. This is not just a best practice in the sense of it'd be great if you do it. It is a requirement for distance education courses at the federal level if the college offers its students federal financial aid. And it is a regulatory requirement straight up in the state of California for any instruction offered by distance education—financial aid or not.

As the term itself suggests, the contact must be regular; it cannot be haphazard, intermittent, or left up to the student to initiate. It must be effective in the sense that it does more than just direct students to a resource, remind them of a course policy, report a grade, or give a one-phrase reply to substantive assignments: it must show evidence of guiding students' understanding of course concepts and materials. Regular effective contact must be between the instructor and student (not, say, only between students). And finally, it must be documentable.

Recently, a very important criterion was to the definition of regular and effective contact: contact *among students*. So as you review your regular and effective contact practices, give consideration to what extent students are regularly and effectively conversing with each other, discussing course concepts, collaborating on assignments, cooperating on projects, or whatever else qualifies as student-to-student contact, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

How Can You Make Sure You are Doing It?

Several years ago the Cerro Coso Academic Senate approved a statement of regular and effective contact between faculty and students. That statement served as the basis for a procedure that is now part of Board Policy that specifically addresses regular effective contact (Administrative Procedure [AP 4105](#)). This statement was recently reviewed and reauthorized by the academic senate. The procedure says in part that any faculty member teaching an online or hybrid course shall do the following:

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Below are some practices that do NOT fulfill the requirements of the administrative procedure, or of our accrediting agency's interpretation, or of the Chancellor's Office requirements for regular and substantive interaction:

- Telling your students to do the reading and assignments and contact you if they have questions - not regular, not effective.
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One additional component of the new district procedure is that your practice and expectations regarding regular effective contact be clearly described on your syllabus, including contact hours and methods, response time expectations, interaction format, and grading turn-around times. Your statement might also include how and when it is to take place, its effect on the overall course grade, any rubrics for scoring that are applicable, etc. The course syllabus is something accreditors and auditors look at.

For more information,

- Contact Director of Distance Education [Rebecca Pang](#), your faculty chair, or your educational administrator

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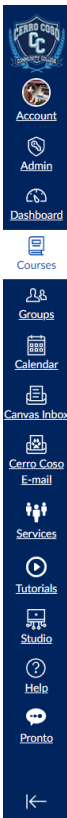
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Distance Education

As explained in the College Catalog, distance education is education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, synchronously and asynchronously.

At Cerro Coso, distance education consists of courses offered from a wide variety of disciplines using three non-traditional delivery methods: Interactive TV, Online, and Hybrid. Dependent upon semester scheduling, Distance Education provides additional educational options to anyone seeking a college education; students dealing with family and/or job commitments, time limitations or transportation difficulties, individuals willing to explore a less traditional presentation of course content, and students who choose to not come to campus for traditionally presented courses. Regardless of the mode of delivery, students receive the same course content described in the catalog.

With Interactive TV courses, instructors may teach from an origination site at any of the campuses, using real-time two-way video/two-way audio technology (TVs). Students benefit from interactivity with students enrolled at one or more remote locations.

Cerro Coso Community College offers a variety of online courses and programs, allowing students to self-select educational opportunities free from any geographical and time boundaries. It is vital that students have a foundational understanding of computer usage, dependable access to the internet, and working knowledge of sending and receiving email. It is also vital that students electing to take online classes understand that they are expected to engage in regular and substantive interaction with the instructor throughout the course and that some courses require proctored exams.

Hybrid courses use the internet as the predominant delivery method combined with traditional face-to-face (F2F) classroom sessions. Students must be able to come to the Cerro Coso Community College campus for an orientation and sessions during the semester as well as have access to the Internet.

Regardless of delivery method, Cerro Coso Community College complies with the federal and accreditation policies that institutions offering distance education courses or programs 1) have processes in place to ensure that the student registering for a course is the same student who participates in the course or receives course credit, and 2) require regular and effective contact between instructor and student.

For more information,

- Visit the [CC-Online](#) mainpage on the college website
- Contact [Rebecca Pang](#), Director of Distance Education, 760-384-6115

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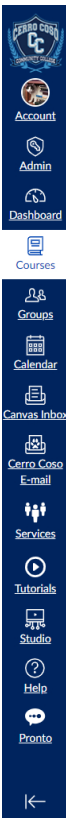
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Regular and Substantive Interaction - Online Classes

There should be numerous channels of communication among and between students and with the instructor in order to develop social integration and create a community of learners. In online classes this can be very different if not difficult. Best practices are not digital analogues to traditional classroom practices, but are rather unique and specific to an effective online learning community.

Contact between instructor and students must be **regular**; it cannot be haphazard, intermittent, or left up to the student to initiate. It must be **substantive** in the sense that it does more than just direct students to a resource, remind them of a course policy, report a grade, or give a one-phrase reply to substantive assignments: it must show evidence of guiding students' understanding of course concepts and materials. And of course it must constitute an **interaction** between instructor and students.

A fourth item not explicitly stated in the language of the regulation but a clear consequence of it is that regular and substantive interaction must be **documentable**. In other words, it needs to be preserved within the context of the course so that it can be reviewed and acknowledged when and if the college is audited.

Recently, a very important criterion was added to the definition of regular and substantive interaction: contact *among students*. So as you review your regular and effective contact practices, give consideration to what extent students are regularly and effectively conversing with each other, discussing course concepts, collaborating on assignments, cooperating on projects, or whatever else qualifies as student-to-student contact, whether synchronously or asynchronously.

[Examples of Regular, Effective, and Documentable Contact](#)

Instructors must monitor, and guide where needed, student-to-student classroom interaction throughout the course to ensure that students are engaging substantively and according to course and college policies.

Additionally, instructors must regularly (at least twice a week) *initiate contact* with and *engage* students in the online classroom.

The following examples of interactions between instructor and students are considered regular, effective, and documentable when used in the Canvas classroom consistently throughout a course:

- Regular discussion interactions initiated and led by the instructor
- Grading feedback (written, audio, or video) tailored to each student
- Use of a grading rubric on student assignments
- Announcements/news
- Peer review or collaboration activities in which the instructor participates substantively
- Collaboration within Canvas in which the instructor participates substantively
- Canvas Inbox-originated emails

The following examples of interactions between instructor and students are considered regular, substantive, and documentable when recorded and preserved within the Canvas classroom:

- ConferZoom sessions
- Chat sessions
- Pronto exchanges

The above guidance is excerpted from:

["Regular Effective, and Documentable Contact ↓"](#) which was drafted by the Cerro Coso Pedagogy and Technology Committee, and adopted by the Cerro Coso Academic Senate on 2/15/18

Please click the link for the whole document.

You can also access a sample section on [Regular Contact with Students ↓](#) for your syllabus.

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