

## ***Regular Effective Contact Definition***

### **Title 5 California Code of Regulations: 55204: Instructor Contact**

Section 55204 requires regular instructor-student contact in distance education courses, stressing the responsibility of the instructor to initiate regular contact with enrolled students to verify their participation and performance status. Furthermore, a number of specific types of interactions are delineated.

### **Title 5: Section 55210: Ongoing Responsibilities of Districts**

Section 55210 further mandates that districts need to specifically describe the type and quantity of student-faculty interaction in their *annual* reports to their local governing boards and the State Chancellor's Office. (Walton, James-Hanz, P., et al, 2008).

### **Rationale: Regular Effective Contact and Effective Practices**

Regular effective contact "...is not a simple matter, but involves a wide variety of elements that reflect the instructor's participation in the course content development and implementation." (Walton, I., James-Hanz, et al. 2008). Research results confirm that establishing an online learning community in a fully online course through group/collaborative learning, substantive discussions, and individual learning, facilitated via substantive instructor-student interaction, is key to online students attaining positive learning outcomes. A hybrid course also demands regular communication not only through the face-to-face meetings of the course, but also in each distance portion of the course (Long Beach City College Distance Learning Course Guidelines, 2009). Therefore it is important to consider the methods of interaction that will be used.

Quality interaction (instructor to student, student to student and student to content) must occur regularly throughout the semester. Good communication is a key factor in student retention and success; students who feel engaged are more likely to complete the course and enjoy their online experience.

Ensuring regular effective instructor-student contact in online courses guarantees students receive 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 (Palomar Community College Instructor/Student Contact Policy for Distance Learning Courses, 2009). The visible personality and preferences of the instructor in a course are major factors in predicting retention in online courses (Reisetter, Marcy, et al.2004).

Furthermore, regular effective contact addresses issues of authentication of students in distance education courses since active student interaction with the instructor, the other students, and the content promote academic integrity. Indeed, best practices in strategies that promote academic integrity are the equivalent strategies that are employed to support regular effective contact. (See WCET *Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education* Version 2.0, June 2009). In the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) article *Are Your Students Really the Ones Registered for the Course? Student Authentication Requirements for Distance Education Providers*, (Feb 2008), instructor-student interactions via written assignments and discussions are recognized strategies that allow the instructor to become familiar with the students' writing style.

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Interactive strategies based in regular effective contact address issues of academic integrity and authentication.

Four of the seven often-cited *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* support the importance of regular effective contact. (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)

1. Encourage faculty to student interaction;
2. Encourage student to student interaction;
3. Promote active learning;
4. Provide rich, rapid feedback

Questions that can be asked about whether effective contact between instructor and students and among students (synchronous or asynchronous) are incorporated into the design of the course include this list from the Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2000):

- a) What provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction are included in the program/course design and the course syllabus? How is appropriate interaction assured?
- b) Is instructor response to student assignments timely? Does it appear to be appropriately responsive?
- c) What technologies are used for program interaction (e.g., email, telephone office hours, phone conferences, voicemail, chat rooms, discussion boards, computer conferences and threaded discussions, etc.)?
- d) How successful is the program's interactive component, as indicated by student and instructor surveys, comments, or other measures?

(Commission on Colleges. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (2000). *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs.*)

**WASC Red Flag:** The discussion board (an asynchronous interaction) in an online course shows little or no activity (DOE, 2006).

Finally, one of the major functions of the required Distance Education Addendum - Form D is to provide information about how the design of the course achieves compliance with State-mandated regular effective contact.

**The Distance Education Committee recommends** that all Distance Education courses include regular effective contact that follows Title 5 regulations and guidelines in Section 55204. Pasadena City College defines regular effective contact by the following guidelines:

(Numbered headings based on Butte College *Distance Learning Online and Hybrid Course Standards* for “regular effective contact.”) (Specific guidelines derived from Walton, I., James-Hanz, P., North, W., & Pilati, M. Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, (2008). *Ensuring the Appropriate Use of Educational Technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates*, pp. 22-23.).

### **1. Initiated regular effective contact**

- a. Contact must include student engagement in all areas of distance learning, instructor to student, student to student, and student to content.
- b. Instructor to student contact includes regular announcements about what is expected of students regarding upcoming assignments and assessments.
- c. Instructor provides communication or collaborative student activities involving contact and interactions on a weekly basis.
- d. General discussion forums for student questions encourage interaction on a daily or weekly basis.
- e. Specific discussion forums for questions regarding an assignment encourage interaction and critical thinking about course content.
- f. Active student interaction with the instructor, fellow students and content takes place each week throughout the course, i.e. through discussions, blogs wikis, self-assessments, posts, email or instant messaging.
- g. Frequent monitoring of any contact activity by the instructor makes sure that students are interacting with their peers and substantively staying on topic.
- h. Regular effective contact includes regularly added/revised, faculty-created course content that in part is based on student feedback.

### **2. Frequency and timeliness of regular effective contact**

- a. An active, daily presence of the instructor is maintained especially during the beginning weeks of a course.
- b. Expectations of availability and a turn-around response time is established and posted for student questions/inquiries, i.e. one to two business days.
- c. Early in the course, students should be given an opportunity to introduce themselves and the instructor should introduce her/himself to model interaction.
- d. Students should receive frequent and substantive feedback from the instructor.
- e. The frequency of contact should be at least the same as would occur for a comparable face-to-face course.

### **3. Expectations regarding regular effective contact**

- a. Specific beginning and ending dates for courses should be clearly defined for students, along with all deadlines for assignments and assessments throughout the course.
- b. The instructor’s specific policies regarding the frequency and timeliness of instructor initiated contact and feedback should be part of the syllabus or other course documents where relevant.
- c. Netiquette is explained and encouraged.
- d. Accessible media in compliance with Section 508 and Chancellor’s Office of the California Community Colleges Guidelines are used to facilitate “regular effective contact.”

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- e. Peer review opportunities, with clear guidelines, should be established.

#### **4. Instructor Absences from regular effective contact**

- a. If an illness, family emergency, or other unexpected reason prevents the instructor from continuing regular effective contact, the instructor or designee (the Division) will inform students expeditiously within the course when regular contact is likely to resume.
- b. In the event of a prolonged absence, the instructor will make appropriate arrangements for the continuation of the course.

### **Resources**

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (August 2008) Distance Learning Manual. Accessed 10/5/09.

[http://www.accjc.org/pdf/Distance\\_Learning\\_Manual\\_August\\_2008.pdf](http://www.accjc.org/pdf/Distance_Learning_Manual_August_2008.pdf)

Butte College Distance Learning Committee. *Course Diagnostic Standards for Online and Hybrid Courses*. Evidence of Provision for “regular effective student contact.” (Revised May 2009).

[http://www.butte.edu/departments/governance/committees/dlc/documents/DLC\\_CDS.pdf](http://www.butte.edu/departments/governance/committees/dlc/documents/DLC_CDS.pdf)

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Title 5 Guidelines Related to Curriculum and Instruction*, Chapter 6, Parts 1 and 2.

<http://www.cccco.edu/ChancellorsOffice/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/Title5Guidelines/tabid/1330/Default.aspx>

Cerritos Community College Standards for Distance Education. (2007). Regular Effective Contact. <http://cms.cerritos.edu/ic/de-standards#VIII>

Chickering, A. & Gamson, Z. (1987). *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7princip.htm>

Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (2000). Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs.

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/commadap.pdf>

Hiltz, S.R. (1998). Collaborative Learning in Asynchronous Learning Networks: Building Learning Communities. [http://web.njit.edu/~hiltz/collaborative\\_learning\\_in\\_asynch.htm](http://web.njit.edu/~hiltz/collaborative_learning_in_asynch.htm)

Long Beach City College Distance Learning Course Guidelines. (2009).

<http://de.lbcc.edu/DLguidelines/>

Palomar Community College Instructor/Student Contact Policy for Distance Learning Courses. (2009).

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<http://www.palomar.edu/accreditation/FollowUpReportEvidence/Instructor%20Student%20Contact%20Policy.pdf>

Reisetter, Marcy, et al. (January 2004). What Works: Student Perceptions to Effective Elements on Online Learning in *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*.

U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. (2006). Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community.

<http://www.ysu.edu/accreditation/Resources/Accreditation-Evidence-of-Quality-in-DE-Programs.pdf>

WCET (Western Cooperative for Educational Technologies). (February 2008). *Are Your Online Students Really the Ones Registered for the Course? Student Authentication Requirements for Distance Education Providers*. A WCET Briefing Paper

[http://wiche.edu/attachment\\_library/Briefing\\_Paper\\_Feb\\_2008.pdf](http://wiche.edu/attachment_library/Briefing_Paper_Feb_2008.pdf)

WCET (Western Cooperative for Educational Technologies). (Version 2.0, June 2009). *Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education*.

[http://wiche.edu/attachment\\_library/Student\\_Authentication/BestPractices.pdf](http://wiche.edu/attachment_library/Student_Authentication/BestPractices.pdf)

Walton, I., James-Hanz, P., North, W., & Pilati, M. (2008). *Ensuring the Appropriate use of Educational technology: An Update for Local Academic Senates*.

[http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/Education\\_Technology.htm](http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/Education_Technology.htm)

**Recommendation Approved by the Distance Education Committee – April 6, 2010**

**Recommendation Approved by the Academic Senate – May 3, 2010**