

Regular Effective Contact Policy

Los Angeles Southwest College

Background

There are several regulations that address the need for regular effective contact between online instructors and students.

Title 5 Regulations

In 2008, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office published the *Distance Education Guidelines*. These guidelines are derived from the California Education Code, Title 5, and most specifically, from the Title 5 article governing distance education, [Title 5, Division 6, Chapter 6, Subchapter 3, Article 1](#).

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) 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, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities. Regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter pursuant to sections 53200 et seq.
- (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.

Subdivision (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.

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, **districts and/or colleges will need to define “effective contact” including how often, and in what manner instructor-student interaction is achieved.** It is important that institutions document regular effective contact and how it 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 55206) as well as during faculty evaluations, student surveys, and program review. 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.**

ACCJC “Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education”

Distance Education means (34 C.F.R. § 602.3.):

Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and **to support regular and substantive interaction** between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include:

- (1) the internet;
- (2) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- (3) audioconferencing; or
- (4) video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

One of the major distinctions between Distance Education and Correspondence Education, according to the ACCJC, is the **regular and substantive interaction** that needs to take place between the students and the instructor.

Los Angeles Southwest College Policy

All distance education courses at Los Angeles Southwest College, whether hybrid or fully online, will include weekly effective contact as described below:

1. **Initiated interaction and frequency of 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 in the course. Distance education courses are considered the “virtual equivalent” of 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 a combination of synchronous and asynchronous modes discussed below in #3, with students in the distance education format.** 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. A response time of 24-48 hours, Monday through Friday, is expected. It must be clear whether or not the instructor will be available after hours or on weekends

and holidays. Instructors should clearly state in the syllabus how long students should expect to wait for a reply to emails and/or phone calls.

2. **First week activities:** During the first week of the term, instructors must:
 - a. Publish their course shells on the first day of the term
 - b. Post the course syllabus on the campus Learning Management System (LMS) on the first day of the term
 - c. Send out a welcome letter and/or announcement (*recommended: send out two working days before the start of the semester*); see example Welcome Letter at http://www.lasc.edu/students/classes-areas-of-study/online_classes/Welcome%20Letter%20Info%20and%20Example.pdf
 - d. Include a check-in assignment (examples: syllabus quiz or introduction discussion forum) that students must complete during the first week. This will allow instructors to identify and drop non-participating students before the census date.

3. **Type of contact:** Weekly contact with students will occur through **some combination** of the following:
 - a. Orientation materials/welcome letter or video
 - b. Weekly announcements in the course management system
 - c. Graded (worth points), threaded discussion boards within the course management system with appropriate instructor participation (Q&A forums are helpful but should be used in conjunction with *graded* forums about course content)
 - d. Email contact within or outside of the course management system (response to student emails should be within 24-48 hours, Monday through Friday)
 - e. Timely personalized feedback for student work (recommended within 7-10 days)
 - f. Instructor response to student work in progress
 - g. Participation in online group collaboration projects (e.g. Canvas Collaborations, group blogs, group discussions, wikis)
 - h. Face-to-face informal meetings (e.g. review sessions)
 - i. Field trips or class outings
 - j. Opportunity for synchronous questions and answers in a chat room
 - k. Synchronous contact through web conferencing

4. **Synchronous contact:** Part of the weekly effective contact instructors have with students should be synchronous. Instructors should have synchronous contact with students for at least 20 minutes per standard hour in order to answer questions and offer guidance as a kind of online “office hours.”

The course syllabus should clearly state *when and how* this contact will occur. Examples include:

- a. Opportunity for synchronous questions and answers in a chat room such as the Chat feature in Canvas

- b. Web conferencing through Canvas Conferences, ConferNow, CCCConfer, or other virtual meeting platforms