

Mt. San Jacinto College

Regular Effective Contact Policy

Regulations:

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

55200. Definition and Application.

Distance education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by distance and interact through the assistance of communication technology. All distance education is subject to the general requirements of this chapter as well as the specific requirements of this article. In addition, instruction provided as distance education is subject to the requirements that may be imposed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. §12100 et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, (29 U.S.C. §794d).

Guideline for Section 55202

This section emphasizes the extent to which course quality depends upon the full involvement of faculty in the design and application of DE courses. It discusses course quality standards for distance education and combines language formerly found in sections 55207 and 55209 which it replaces. Language is added to clarify that normal course quality standards apply to any portion of a course conducted through distance education.

55202. Course Quality Standards.

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom 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.

NOTE: Authority cited: Section 66700 and 70901, Education Code. References: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code.

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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.

NOTE: Authority cited: Sections 66700 and 70901, Education Code. Reference: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code.

Guideline for Section 55204

This section defines what contact must be maintained between instructor and student. It is virtually identical to section 55211 which it replaces, except that language has been added to clarify that rules related to conduct of distance education and effective instructor contact apply to any portion of a course conducted through distance education.

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 to 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.

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.

Title 5 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. The guidelines do say that quality assurances within the regulations apply to all DE courses, which include hybrid courses. 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”.

MSJC Policy:

All DE courses at MSJC, whether hybrid or fully online will include regular effective contact as described below:

- **Initiated interaction:** 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. Opportunities that relate to the content of the course should include those in which students interact with instructors, instructors to interact with students, and students to interact with each other. Providing students with an open-ended question forum, although required, does not constitute the entirety of effective instructor initiated interaction. In addition to open-ended question forums, utilizing CMS blogs, journals, MSJC email, and collaboration chat tools are appropriate to engage instructor and student interaction. Furthermore, implementing web 2.0 tools into course activities (ie. VoiceThread, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) are also appropriate tools to create interaction. Some web 2.0 tools can be brought into the CMS and some can be linked from the CMS. Instructor prepared content (written, recorded, broadcast, etc.) combined with other course materials, creates the “virtual equivalent” of the face-to-face class and must be included in your course.
- **Frequency:** DE 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 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 asynchronous and/or synchronous mode, with students in the DE format. A class that meets three hours a week would require three hours of 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 that regular contact is maintained over the course of a week and should occur as often as is appropriate for the course.

- **Establishing expectations and managing unexpected instructor absence:** An instructor and/or department established policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor initiated contact and instructor feedback, will be posted in the syllabus and/or other course documents that are 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), notification to students will be made in the announcements area of the course that includes 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 is unavailable.

Type of Contact: Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all MSJC DE courses, instructors will, at a minimum, use the following resources to initiate contact with students:

- Threaded discussion forums within the course management system, with appropriate instructor participation. (“Questions for the instructor” forums are good but should be used in conjunction with other forums.)
- MSJC email
- Weekly announcements in the Course Management System
- Timely feedback for student work.

Suggestions:

- Instructors should also choose to use other forms of communication, as mentioned in section 55204 of Title 5. (“...*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.*”) and/or CCCConfer, video conference, pod cast, or other synchronous technologies may also be included. CCCConfer is a web conferencing tool that is free to the California Community College System. <http://www.cccconfer.org>.
- It is suggested that instructors have a threaded discussion that is set aside for general questions about the course and may wish to have weekly or other timely, question and answer sessions available to students. This may be accomplished through virtual office hours.
- It is recommended that Instructors engage students with web 2.0 tools and applications such as although not limited to VoiceThread, Twitter, Facebook, polleverywhere, doodle, Animoto, Prezi, Glogster, GoogleDocs, Wordle, Bitstrips etc.
- A suggested approach for DE instructors to stay current with new and emerging technology is to subscribe to SSE feeds such as although, not limited to Edudemic, wix, MindShift, TED, Mashable, Online Teaching Conference, The Faculty Project, Visually, etc.

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