



BC Regular Effective Contact Policy

Regulations

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

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 non-traditionally delivered 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 traditionally delivered face-to-face course, the instructor is present at each class meeting and interacts via all class announcements, lectures, activities and discussions which take a variety of forms. For example, discussions occur naturally between and among students and the instructor during lecture, group work, 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. Outside the classroom, these types of questions are dealt with via the telephone, email, or face to face office visits.

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."

Foundation for BC's Policy

All non-traditionally delivered/DE courses at BC, whether ITV, Interactive, Online or Hybrid will include regular effective contact as described below:

1. Means of regular, effective contact:

Instructors should also choose to use other forms of communication, as suggested in section 55204 of Title 5, that address a variety of learning styles and modalities in order to ensure regular, effective contact and student success. (*"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"* 55204.(a). In addition, CCCConfer, video conferences, podcasts, skype, or other synchronous technologies may be included among methods of achieving and maintaining regular effective contact with students.

2. Instructor initiated contact

Instructors will initiate contact with students at least two times during or before the first week of classes. One of these contacts will be on the first day of classes.

3. Instructor/student interaction

Instructors will regularly interact with students to determine that they are accessing and comprehending course material, participating regularly in all required activities of the course, and progressing through the course in timely fashion in accordance with the published course syllabus.

4. Quality of instructor-student interaction:

Bakersfield College recognizes that courses taught via DE are not and cannot be taught as correspondence courses, e.g. while including activities such as self-graded quizzes or open-ended question forums among the course activities may be appropriate, they do not constitute the entirety of effective instructor initiated interaction. To ensure quality interaction, instructors will:

- a) allocate the same number of hours as a face to face course. Instructors should plan to devote time for student-teacher communication in addition to time spent grading assignments;

- b) conduct student-teacher interaction with the same care and full attention to students that occurs during face-to-face, i.e. not while performing other professional duties such as attending meetings, monitoring labs, etc.;
- c) use a variety of methods and resources to initiate and maintain contact with students, e.g. threaded discussion forums with appropriate instructor participation, email, voicemail, correspondence, weekly announcements in the Course Management System/Course Site,
- d) evaluate coursework in a timely manner, including comments and feedback;
- e) respond to student emails, postings, and requests for information within 48 hours.

5. **Teaching loads:** Faculty, chair, and dean will establish teaching loads that ensure that regular, effective contact as defined in this policy is able to take place.
6. **Frequency of interaction:** DE 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 asynchronous and/or synchronous mode, with students in the DE 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.
7. **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 should 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 working days), arrangements should be made for a substitute instructor to assist students.
8. **Approval of a distance education course:** Instructors must be prepared to demonstrate to the Extended Learning Sub-Committee and their Department Evaluation Committee not only the pedagogical soundness of offering a course via DE but also explain in detail how they maintain regular effective instructor-initiated contact with students over the entire semester.