

LPC Regular Effective Contact Guidelines

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).

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

Reference: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code; Title 29 United States Code Section 794d, and Title 42 United States Code Section 12100 et seq.

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.

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.

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:

Regular effective contact between instructor and students is a basic tenet in all courses, and Distance Education is no exception. According to Title 5, all DE courses, whether they are fully online or hybrid, must demonstrate regular effective contact. For hybrids, this contact is required not only during on-campus meetings, but it is also required during the virtual meetings. The ACCJC has also stated that regular effective contact in all online and hybrid courses is a requirement for accreditation. Furthermore, if there is no such contact, DE courses can be designated correspondence courses during an auditing process, and this can affect the college's ability to provide federal financial aid to students. LPC's Regular Effective Contact Guidelines aims to set forth the “minimum standards of regular effective contact,” as stated in the DE Guidelines for the California Community Colleges.

LPC Guidelines:

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

- **Initiated interaction:** Instructors should 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. Providing students with an open-ended question forum, although appropriate, does not constitute the entirety of effective instructor initiated interaction.
- **Frequency:** DE courses are considered the “virtual equivalent” of on-campus courses. Therefore, the frequency of the contact should occur as often as is appropriate for the course.

- **Establishing expectations:** An instructor- and/or department-established policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor-initiated contact and instructor feedback, can be posted in the syllabus and/or other course documents that are made available for students when the course officially opens each semester.

Type of Contact:

Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all LPC DE courses, instructors should, along with providing instructional content, use some combination of the following resources to initiate and engage in meaningful contact with students:

- Interactive tools, such as discussion boards, blogs, wikis, chat, and other forms of social media
- General email
- Weekly announcements in the course management system
- Timely feedback for student work.

Documentation:

- In order to document regular effective contact, instructors are encouraged to archive email exchanges between them and students. Courses are archived at the conclusion of each semester, so interactions within the courses will be preserved.

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 web conference, video conference, podcast, or other synchronous technologies may also be included.
- 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 also be accomplished through virtual office hours.

These guidelines were modeled after—with permission—Mt. San Jacinto College’s Regular Effective Contact Policy. They were approved by the LPC Academic Senate on Nov. 28, 2012.