Policy on Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) for Distance Education (DE)

San Bernardino Valley College

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Overview

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is defined by federal regulation (34 CFR §600.2) as instructor-initiated, predictable, academic engagement that includes direct instruction, feedback on assessments, facilitation of content-related discussions, and other instructional activities.

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has released updated guidance and a rubric to help institutions evaluate and improve RSI in Distance Education (DE). While the rubric is intended as a support tool, rather than a formal evaluation instrument, each institution is expected to establish its own RSI policy. Note: ACCJC's pilot rubric defines "direct instruction" as synchronous engagement. Asynchronous instructional activities may still meet RSI standards under other categories when they reflect an active teaching presence and support student learning.

During accreditation review, ACCJC will examine a random sample of DE courses to determine whether they meet the institution's defined RSI standards. At least 85% of the course sections reviewed must demonstrate RSI to meet the accreditation standard.

Policy

Instructors are expected to initiate regular interaction with students to ensure consistent engagement and to support student success. Regular interaction for SBVC's online courses is defined as follows:

Course Length	Minimum Regular Interaction	Rationale
12 weeks or longer	At least once per week	Standard pacing supports weekly pattern
Fewer than 12 weeks	More than once per week	Accelerated pacing requires increased engagement

Collegial consultation timeline: DE Committee (originated: 9/19/2025); Academic Senate (date); College Council (date); President's Executive Council (date)

The following activities qualify as Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) when they are instructor-initiated, academic in nature, and designed to support student learning. Each activity must reflect a teaching presence and occur consistently throughout the course.

Regular, Synchronous Office Hours

Scheduled office hours qualify as RSI when they are instructor-initiated, occur consistently throughout the course (at least weekly), and are clearly communicated to the students. Office hours must provide students with the opportunity to ask questions and engage in academic dialogue related to course content, assignments, or feedback.

Note: "By appointment" office hours do not count as RSI.

Regular Announcements

Weekly instructor-initiated announcements that support student learning by reinforcing key concepts, clarifying expectations, guiding course progress, or supporting ongoing engagement.

Note: Announcements such as "Module 2 is open," or "Quiz on Monday," are considered merely logistical and are not considered RSI.

Weekly Instructional Overviews or Course-Level Framing

Instructor-created weekly overviews or module introductions qualify as RSI when they provide academic framing, clarify expectations, and guide students through the course content. These may be delivered via announcements, videos, or written commentary.

Note: Overviews that are purely logistical or lack instructional guidance do not meet RSI standards.

Proactive Outreach

Instructor-initiated outreach qualifies as RSI when it includes academic guidance tailored to student progress. Examples include contacting students who may need additional support or are falling behind, providing feedback that anticipates misconceptions, offering clarification before issues arise, and initiating progress check-ins. Instructional announcements that go beyond logistics to reinforce concepts or guide learning also meet RSI standards.

Note: Sending a message reminding students to submit an assignment does not count as RSI, as it is merely logistical and does not include academic guidance, clarification, or instructional support.

Feedback on Student Work

Feedback qualifies as RSI when it is timely, instructor-initiated, and personalized.

- Timely means students receive feedback in time to apply it before the next major activity (best practice: within one week).

- Instructor-initiated means the instructor constructs and delivers specific feedback about the student's assignment to help support learning and improvement.

Note: Automatically graded quizzes in Canvas are acceptable assessments, however, they do not meet RSI standards unless accompanied by instructor-initiated feedback.

Instructor-Initiated Content Delivery

Instructor-created instructional materials, such as videos, narrated presentations, or written walkthroughs that explain course concepts, qualify as RSI when they are academic in nature, clearly initiated by the instructor, and designed to support student learning. These materials demonstrate teaching presence and may be delivered asynchronously.

Note: While ACCJC's pilot rubric defines "direct instruction" as synchronous engagement, asynchronous content delivery may still meet RSI standards under other categories when it reflects active teaching presence and supports student learning.

Instructor-Led or Facilitated Academic Discussions

Instructor participation in course discussions qualifies as RSI when it includes academic guidance, prompts deeper inquiry, connects student contributions to course concepts, or provides clarification. To meet RSI standards, instructors must engage consistently and substantively, not just monitor or grade participation.

Note: Passive observation or grading of discussion posts without instructional engagement does not meet RSI standards.

Instructor-Facilitated Group Activities

Instructor guidance during collaborative or group-based activities may qualify as RSI when it includes academic support, clarification, or feedback throughout the process.

Note: Passive observation or grading alone does not meet RSI standards.

Instructor Response to Student Questions

Instructor's replies to student questions may qualify as RSI when they are timely, academic in nature, and provide individualized instructional support. Responses must address course content or competencies, reflect an active teaching presence, and support student learning.

Note: Replies to logistical or administrative questions (e.g., due dates, navigation issues) do not meet RSI standards. Sporadic or generic responses that lack instructional depth are also not considered RSI.