

RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Summary of Regulations for Regular and Effective/Substantive Contact for Distance Education

Code of Federal Regulations – Title 34: Education #602.3 Also adopted by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), see ACCJC 2013 Guide, pp. 2-3.

Definition of Correspondence Education

Correspondence Education (CE) means:

- (1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor;
- (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student;
- (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and,
- (4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

Definition of Distance Education (DE):

“Distance Education is defined, for the purpose of accreditation review, as a formal interaction which uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and which supports regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. Distance education often incorporates technologies such as the internet: one-way and two-way transmission through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing’ or video cassettes, DVDs, CD-ROMS, in conjunction with any other technologies.” (*ACCJC 2013 Guide, p. 2*)

The Commission (ACCJC) recognizes and embraces distance education as a convenient, flexible, and effective means of providing quality education. Many working students with multiple demands on their time find that distance education meets their needs better than campus-based education.

2. California Regulations:

California Code of Regulations, Title 5 and Chancellor’s Office of the California Community Colleges, Distance Education Guidelines (2008)

Title 5 §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

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et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, (29 U.S.C. §794d).

CCCCO Guideline for Section §55200.

Ensuring that distance education courses, materials and resources are accessible to students with disabilities is a shared institutional responsibility. Faculty need to receive appropriate training in order to ensure that they understand what constitutes accessibility, and institutions must provide faculty with both the necessary training and resources to ensure accessibility. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12100 et seq.), section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794d), and California Government Code section 11135 all require that accessibility for persons with disabilities be provided in the development, procurement, maintenance, or use of electronic or information technology by a community college district using any source of state funds. (See Legal Opinion M 03-09). Title 5, section 55200 explicitly makes these requirements applicable to all distance education offerings.

Title 5 §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.

CCCCO 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 that it replaces. Language is added to clarify that normal course quality standards apply to any portion of a course conducted through distance education.

Title 5 §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.

CCCCO Guideline for Section §55204.

This section defines what contact must be maintained between instructor and student. It is virtually identical to section 55211 that 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.

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)—ACCJC Guide to Evaluating Distance Education and Correspondence Education, June 2013 edition.

Note: Some of the questions posed in the ACCJC Guide 2013 are addressed through these four RCCD/College documents [1 – 4]. Questions below are extracted as samples of the level of scrutiny the college needs to maintain to be compliant. Distance Education faculty are encouraged to read the ACCJC Guide 2013 in its entirety:

Standard I.B.1. Questions: What parties are involved in the institution’s [ongoing, collegial, self-reflective] dialog about the continuous improvement of student learning through DE mode and how it compares with student learning in traditional programs? How is this dialog organized and communicated?

Standard I.B.3. Questions: Does the college have separate processes for the planning, approval, evaluation, and review of courses offered in DE mode...? ...How are these processes integrated into the college’s overall planning process? In the college knowledgeable about current federal regulations related to DE?

Standard I.B.7. Questions: What mechanism does the institution use to gather evidence about the effectiveness of DE learning programs and related student learning and support services? Are they different from the mechanisms applied for review of traditional

programs and services? How effectively do evaluation processes and results contribute to improvement of DE programs, related library and other student support and learning services?

Standard II.A.1. Questions: How does the institution ensure that its DE programs and services are of high quality, comparable with the institution's face-to-face offering, and appropriate to an institution of higher education?

Standard II.A.1.a. Questions: Is there a policy that defines "regular and substantive interaction" for DE courses? (C.F.R. § 602.3)

Standard II.A.1.b. Questions: ...Is the level of effectiveness for facilitating student learning different from traditional delivery modes?

Standard II.A.1.c. Questions: If the institution uses course materials developed outside the institution for its programs offered in DE format, how are these materials assessed, and how does the institution ensure that the academic standards are comparable with its other programs?

Standard II.A.2.a. Questions: What is the role of faculty and how is discipline expertise or teaching knowledge and expertise in the field of DE used for establishing the quality of these courses?

Standard II.A.1.b. Questions: Has the college established advisory committees with expertise in DE, and if so, what is their role?

Standard II.A.1.c. Questions: What teaching methodologies are commonly used in DE programs? How are methodologies selected? Do faculty discuss the relationship between the selected teaching methodologies and student performance?

Standard II.A.1.e. Questions: How does the college evaluate the effectiveness of its courses and programs offered in DE mode? Is the process similar to courses and program offered in traditional mode? What is the rationale?

Standard III.A.5. Questions: What professional development activities relevant for DE personnel does the institution support and/or provide? How does the institution determine the professional needs of its personnel involved in DE? What professional development programs on teaching and learning methodologies in DE does the institution provide?