

FOOTHILL COLLEGE

Best Practices for Online/Distance Education Courses

In accordance with Title 5, discussions in the Faculty Academic Senate and the College Curriculum Committee, a survey of faculty, online discussions, and a review of the pertinent literature, the Foothill College Academic Senate has formulated the following best practices and guidelines for “Regular, Timely and Effective Student/Faculty Contact” in online/distance education courses:

Best Practices

1. **Communication:** clear and comprehensive communication regarding online course policies is critical to student success and faculty effectiveness. ⁱⁱⁱ Accordingly, it’s imperative that the following are addressed explicitly in the course syllabus and/or introductory email/announcement.
These communication guidelines are the same for all teachers and are in accordance with J1 Evaluative Material (Section II.A.12) “*Provides students with a written explanation of the evaluation process, expectations and requirements, assignments, course content, relevant dates, and other information.*” and is the same requirement for all teachers. Communication must include but is not limited to:
 - **Relevant Dates, Course Schedule, and Deadlines.**
 - **Faculty Expectations and Requirements** for minimum student participation (quantity and quality) for all sections of the course.
 - **Evaluation Process** including the timeframe for faculty feedback on student works such as discussion posts, and assessments (quizzes, exams, assignments, projects, surveys) so that the student can gauge their progress. Faculty must provide substantive feedback within a reasonable time as outlined in the course syllabus.
 - **Faculty/Student Communication Process** including the timeframe for faculty response to student communications. A response time of 24-48 hours, Monday through Friday is desirable but may vary based on course requirements and extenuating circumstances. It must be clear whether or not the instructor will be available after hours or on weekends and holidays.
 - **Methods of regular, timely, and effective student/faculty contact** that will be employed in the course (as described below)
 - **A Contingency Plan** for when the instructor is unavoidably unavailable for a specific period. Faculty must provide the students with a plan for instances when they may not be available due to personal or technical emergencies. Announcing (in advance if possible) any absence of greater than two working days and providing clear options for students to continue their progress in the class until the instructor returns is essential.

2. **Effective Student/Faculty Contact:** it has been clearly shown that lack of regular, timely, and effective contact between students and instructors is a major factor in student attrition and poor performance in online courses. Depending on class design and Instructor preference, the faculty shall employ one or more of the following methods of regular, timely, and effective student/faculty contact in all online, hybrid, and web-enhanced courses: (it is recognized that instructors of web-enhanced and Hybrid courses have more in-person contact with their students and would as such rely less on these methods.)
These effective contact guidelines are the same requirements for all teachers and are in accordance with J1.II.A.7: “*Maintains student-faculty relationship conducive to learning,*” as well as the following student evaluation criteria: J2.A. #11 *Motivated student interest and intellectual effort*, #12. *Encouraged students to ask questions and participate in class discussions*, #13. *Encouraged individual thinking and differences of opinion*, and #14. *Used full class time effectively.*”

List of Senate Recommended Methods of Regular, Timely, & Effective Student/Faculty Contact (in no particular order)

- Private Messages within the Course Management System
- Personal e-mail outside of the Course Management System
- Telephone Contact
- Weekly Announcements in the Course Management System
- Chat Room within the Course Management System
- Timely feedback and return of student work (tasks, tests, surveys, and discussions) in Course Management System by methods clarified in the syllabus.
- Discussion Forums with appropriate facilitation and/or substantive instructor participation^{iv}
- E-Portfolios/Blogs/Wiki for sharing student works in progress; provide feedback from fellow students and faculty in a collaborative manner, and to demonstrate mastery, comprehension, application, and synthesis of a given set of concepts. ^v
- Group or individual meetings ^{iv}
- Orientation and review sessions ^{iv}
- Supplemental seminar or study sessions^{iv}
- Field trips ^{iv}
- Library workshops ^{iv}

If, for whatever reason, a faculty member is unable to comply with the regular, timely, and effective contact guidelines set forth in the Addendum to the Course Outline of Record and the course syllabus, students must be informed via e-mail or high priority announcement as to when they can expect regular, timely, and effective contact to resume.

References:

ⁱ Roblyer, M.D. & Leticia Ekhami (2000, Spring), How Interactive are YOUR Distance Courses? A Rubric for Assessing Interaction in Distance Learning, Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume III, Number II, Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 4, 2001

<http://www.westga.edu/~distance/roblyer32.html>

ⁱⁱ Slater, Timothy F. "Classroom Assessment Technique Portfolios." CL-1: Field-tested Learning Assessment Guide (FLAG) for science, math, engineering, and technology instructors. 1998.

<http://www.flaguide.org/cat/portfolios/portfolios7.php>

^{iv} Title 5 §55204

ⁱⁱⁱ Waterhouse, S. & Rogers, R. (2004), The Importance of Policies in E-Learning Instruction, EDUCAUSE Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 28-39.

^{iv} Roblyer, M.D. & Leticia Ekhami (2000, Spring), How Interactive are YOUR Distance Courses? A Rubric for Assessing Interaction in Distance Learning, Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume III, Number II, Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 4, 2001 <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/roblyer32.html>

^v Slater, Timothy F. "Classroom Assessment Technique Portfolios." CL-1: Field-tested Learning Assessment Guide (FLAG) for science, math, engineering, and technology instructors. 1998.

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