REGULAR & SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION IN DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES—GUIDANCE & RESOURCES[1]

Federal US Department of Education (DoE) regulatory definitions of distance education *require* that institutions ensure *regular and substantive interaction (RSI)* between a student and an instructor(s).

RSI compliance is the legal federal requirement that distinguishes distance education courses from correspondence courses. This distinction is relevant because correspondence courses are ***not*** eligible for financial aid. If HPU were audited by the US Department of Education's (DoE) Office of Inspector General, or as part of a periodic Departmental financial aid program review, and found to be out of compliance, the institution could lose federal financial aid.

Definitions[2]

[1] The RSI graphic illustration and some content has been adapted and is used with the permission of the SUNY Online Team.

[2] Retrieved from Regular and Substantive Interaction: Regulatory & Pedagogical Implications presentation by WCET

*An **instructor** is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency. Eligible programs can be taught by "the instructor or instructors.*

*A **distance education course** is one in which instruction is delivered by one or more types of technology, including the internet, various wired and wireless media, or audio conference to students who are separated from the instructor(s). These technologies "support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.*

***Predictable and Scheduled Interaction:** Regular interaction requires an institution to ensure, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency, that there is the opportunity for **substantive interactions** with the student on a **predictable and scheduled basis** commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency.*

*The institution also is responsible for **monitoring the student's academic engagement** and **success** and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.*

***Academic engagement** requires active participation by a student in an instructional activity related to the student's course of study as defined by the institution consistent with any requirements imposed by its state approval or accrediting agency. Academic engagement can include such activities as attending a class where the students and instructor can interact, turning in an academic assignment or taking a test, participating in an interactive computer-assisted instruction, participating in an institutional-directed group activity or online discussion, or interacting with the instructor regarding academic matters.*

An emphasis on regular and substantive interaction is entirely consistent with well-documented research-based effective practices in online course design and delivery. In online teaching and learning environments of any kind, (asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid), regular and substantive interactions must:

- Be **with an instructor**.
- Be **initiated** by the instructor.
- Be **scheduled and predictable.**
- Be **academic** in nature and **relevant** to the course.
- Substantive interaction assumes ***direct interaction between the learner and the instructor*** and requires **direct instruction** from the instructor including**:**
    - **Assessing** or **providing feedback** on a student's coursework.
    - Providing **information** or responding to questions about the content of a course.
    - Facilitating a **group discussion** regarding the content of a course or competency.

- **Other instructional activities** approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

STRATEGIES CHECKLIST WITH EMBEDDED RESOURCES

Evidence of RSI must be evident in the **design of a distance learning course** within Blackboard. Following are strategies with resource links AND samples for instructors to implement RSI with fidelity in distance learning courses.[3] Please copy/paste or adapt provided samples as appropriate. *Strategies outlined also align to the Quality Matters Rubric, the industry standard rubric used by HPU to ensure quality online course design, as indicated.*

√	Clearly define course objectives that are measurable and aligned to learning activities and assessments. (QM SRS 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5)

√	Include **Welcome** or **Getting Started** menu item**.** (QM SRS 1.1, 1.2, 1.4,1.5,1.8, 1.9, 6.4,7.1,7.2,7.3,7.4)

√	Add **Course Information** menu item including contact information for instructor, department, and program. (QM SRS 1.2,1.3,1.4)

SAMPLE CONTACT INFORMATION
Instructor: Dr. John Smith
Email: jsmith@hpu.edu
Office Hours: By appointment (via Zoom or phone)
Department: Department of Computer Science
Email: compsci@hpu.edu
Phone: (808) 555-1234
Location: Waterfront Building 5, Room 302
Program: Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
Email: csprogram@hpu.edu
Phone: (808) 555-5678
Website: www.hpu.edu/computerscience

[3] Retrieved from OSCQR Suny Online Course Quality Review Rubric

Note: For general inquiries and administrative support, please contact the department or program office. For course-specific questions or concerns, please reach out to me directly using the email feature in Blackboard.

√ Within the **Course Information** menu item, outline regular and substantive instructor-to-student expectations, and predictable/scheduled interactions and feedback. (QM SRS 5.3)

SAMPLE RSI INSTRUCTOR TO STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Communication Channels

Email: The primary mode of communication for the course will be email. Please use the **course mail** feature within our Blackboard course. This feature helps to collate emails from the course so I can prioritize your correspondence. If the need arises for you to email me outside of Blackboard, please use your official HPU email address to email me.

Discussion Forum: We will use the Blackboard discussion forum where you can post questions, engage in discussions, and seek clarification on course-related topics. There is a discussion thread called "course questions" where you can post general questions about the course. I will check this daily.

Virtual Office Hours: I will hold virtual office hours by appointment to provide additional support and address any concerns you may have. The office hours will be conducted via Zoom. Please email me using the **course mail** feature within our Blackboard course to set up appointments. I will also require ONE virtual office hour with you during the course to check in on your progress. Look for the sign-up sheet soon via an announcement.

Expected Response Time: 24-48 hours is a reasonable window of time to expect a response from me, excluding holidays. If I do not respond within 48 hours, please reach out again to ensure I receive your message.

Scheduled Interactions and Feedback

Discussion Forum Participation: I will actively participate in the discussion forum, providing timely responses and guidance.

Weekly Announcements: Every Monday, I will post a weekly announcement summarizing the topics, assignments, and important reminders for the week.

Optional Live Sessions: I will offer live sessions on a weekly basis, providing opportunities for real-time interaction, Q&A sessions, and additional explanations of course content. These will be scheduled according to best availability of those enrolled in class. These sessions will be recorded and posted within the course for those who are unable to attend.

Assignment Feedback: I will provide timely feedback on assignments, including constructive comments and suggestions for improvement. You may expect 24–48-hour turnaround time on weekly assignments.
Grading Turnaround Time: Grades will be returned within a week for all major assignments.

Course Updates and Modifications:
Any changes or modifications to the course schedule, assignments, or materials will be communicated well in advance through email and/or the course announcement board.

Note: It is important to regularly check your HPU email and the course in Blackboard for updates and notifications related to the course.

√ Clearly outline expectations for all course interactions (instructor to student, student to student, student to instructor) (QM SRS 5.3, 5.4)

SAMPLE INTERACTION EXPECTATIONS FOR A DISCUSSION BOARD

These instructions are designed to create a respectful, engaging, and collaborative space where you can learn from your classmates and contribute to meaningful discussions. By following these guidelines, you will enhance your learning experience and foster a positive online community.

1. Treat your classmates with respect and professionalism. Use polite language and avoid personal attacks or offensive remarks. Constructively express any disagreements or criticisms you may have.
2. Participate actively in discussions by sharing your unique perspectives and ideas. Provide thoughtful responses that add value to the conversation. Support your arguments with evidence or examples to enhance the discussion.
3. Once your initial post is submitted by Wednesday of each week, aim to respond promptly to your peers' posts. Keep the conversation flowing smoothly by engaging **daily**. Regularly check the discussion board for updates to stay involved.
4. Collaborate with your peers to create a supportive learning environment. Share relevant resources, offer guidance, and help clarify concepts for others. Embrace diverse opinions and actively contribute to peer learning.
5. Adhere to the guidelines for the discussion board. This includes citing sources properly, avoiding plagiarism, and providing accurate information. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of your peers by not sharing personal or sensitive information outside the course context.

√ Include Module Agendas (QM SRS 2.1, 2.2,2.3)

SAMPLE MODULE AGENDA

Week 1 Overview

This week we will explore technologies in the digital classroom, paying close attention to the opportunities and challenges inherent in instructional technology. Technology in learning spaces is not a neutral topic. Many folks have strong feelings either way, and oftentimes for equally valid reasons. It is likely that you also have strong feelings one way or the other! We will also start to learn some of the basics of using the Camtasia software for video creation. For the perfectionists in the room (ahem, speaking to myself as much as anyone else), this week is just about exploration. One of the best ways to learn how to use a digital tool well is to try it without worrying so much about making it perfect the first time, or even fifth time around. I like Camtasia because it is more intuitive than most video editing tools. However, there is a learning curve. Be generous with yourself as you play around with it. AND reach out if you need support.

By the end of this week, you will be able to :

1. Identify and describe supplemental technologies most useful in digital instruction.
2. Identify and discuss opportunities and challenges associated with implementing traditional, mobile, and emerging technologies in digital instruction.
3. Record, edit, and share a video using the Camtasia software (practice runs).

Week 1 Activities:

POST to the Getting to Know You Padlet Wall.

WATCH video introduction to the week.

WATCH Camtasia tutorials and download Camtasia.

READ Technologies in the Digital Classroom, Chapter 4.

POST DQ 1 and RESPOND to peers.

COMPLETE week 1 anonymous reflection.

Week 1 Guiding Question:

What are the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing technology in the digital classroom?

√ Provide clear, specific, and well written instructions. (QM SRS 3.3)

SAMPLE DISCUSSION BOARD INSTRUCTIONS

Week #1 Discussion Topic: Technology in the digital classroom-opportunities and challenges.

Synopsis: Chapter 4 discusses some of the opportunities and challenges inherent in using technology in the digital learning landscape. Reflect upon your own experiences with digital learning and/or instruction.

1. What challenges have you experienced? How did that impact learning?
2. What opportunities have you experienced? How did that impact learning?
3. How might we navigate these challenges and opportunities as instructional designers?

Please include any links and/or citations and references in your individual discussion post.

Due Dates:

Wednesday by 8 a.m. HST Post a roughly 250-word original response to the discussion prompt in the discussion board thread for your discussion group (please adhere to this deadline as your colleagues and I need time to read and reflect upon your post).

Friday by 8 a.m. HST Respond to posts in the discussion thread that you find particularly compelling.

Friday thru Monday. Check in with the conversation and comment upon peers' postings to expand the conversation as you see fit. When you post messages online, follow the discussion board interaction expectations and the basic principles of netiquette - rules for communication online. (The Core Rules of Netiquette are located on the web site http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html)

Please let me know if you have any additional questions or comments via Course Mail link in our course menu here in Blackboard.

Mahalo!

√ Outline the criteria for the assessment of all graded assignments (rubrics, exemplary work). (QM SRS 3.3)

SAMPLE EXEMPLARY DISCUSSION BOARD POST MODEL

Hello class,

Please find the rubric for discussion posts here: **Discussion Rubric.pdf**. I have also included models of ineffective versus effective discussion board posts alongside my commentary to help us all meet the mark in these weekly discussions.

Discussion Topic: Technology in the digital classroom-opportunities and challenges.
Ineffective post: I feel like technology is just making things more complicated in the digital learning landscape. There are so many tools and platforms to navigate, and it's overwhelming. I don't see how all this technology is enhancing the learning experience. Is anyone else feeling frustrated with this reliance on technology?
This post expresses frustration without offering any constructive insights or seeking input from others. It overlooks the potential opportunities that technology presents and fails to engage in a productive discussion about navigating the challenges. Such a post may hinder constructive conversation and limit the exploration of effective strategies.
Effective Post: While technology can present certain complexities, I believe it also brings remarkable opportunities for enhancing the learning experience. One key opportunity lies in the accessibility of learning resources. Technology allows for the creation and delivery of multimedia content, interactive simulations, and collaborative platforms, which can engage learners in new and dynamic ways. Furthermore, technology enables personalized learning experiences, adaptive assessments, and data-driven insights, empowering educators to cater to diverse student needs.
However, we must also acknowledge the challenges that arise. The rapidly evolving technological landscape demands continuous learning and adaptability from both educators and learners. Technical issues, connectivity constraints, and the need for digital literacy pose challenges to effective implementation. Additionally, concerns about data privacy, digital distractions, and maintaining a balance between technology and human interaction should not be overlooked.
In navigating these challenges, we can explore strategies to mitigate potential issues. This includes providing comprehensive training and support for educators to develop their technological competence, fostering a student-centered approach that ensures equitable access to technology, and prioritizing pedagogical considerations when selecting and integrating instructional media tools.
Have you encountered any strategies or best practices that address these challenges? Looking forward to an engaging discussion!
In the effective post, the writer initiates a constructive dialogue about the opportunities and challenges of using technology in the digital learning landscape. They recognize both the benefits and complexities and invite their peers to share their experiences and insights. The post encourages exploration of strategies to navigate the challenges and highlights the importance of pedagogical considerations and equitable access. This approach fosters meaningful discussions that promote understanding and effective utilization of instructional media in digital learning environments.

√ Provide activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication, promote regular and substantive interaction, and establish trust (e.g., ice-breaking activities, Course Bulletin Board, planned Office Hours, etc.) (QM SRS 5.2)

√ Provide opportunities for learners to review their performance and assess their own learning throughout the course (via pre-tests, self-tests with feedback, reflective assignments, peer assessment, etc.). (QM SRS 3.3, 3.4)

To plan and evaluate courses for RSI, use the Documenting Regular & Substantive Interaction form.