



## Distance Education Review - Frequently Asked Questions

1. In an asynchronous course section, does providing voiceover PowerPoint presentations count as direct instruction?

No, direct instruction is only a method considered by the Department of Education in live synchronous course sections. However, voiceover PowerPoint presentations will count as one of the methods of substantive interaction since it is a means of providing information about course content.

2. If synchronous course sections are included in the sample the peer reviewers evaluate, will they need to view recorded Zoom meetings?

No, ACCJC does not require observation of recorded Zoom meetings; peer reviewers will review the syllabus to verify that the course section was synchronous, and the content covered by the instructor, in order to validate direct instruction.

3. The institution uses various third-party platforms and technologies to communicate and engage with students in the asynchronous course sections. How can this be made available to peer reviewers?

Reviewers should have a level of access to the LMS (typically 'instructor' level) that allows them to observe activities where this interaction takes place, such as on discussion boards, other postings, and communications regarding learning content, feedback on assignments, etc. It is the institution's responsibility to provide any additional access to relevant documentation to verify regular and substantive interaction. The institution must have methods to ensure that the instructor's interaction with students is substantive and regular.

4. The ACCJC *Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education* refers to the term 'Instructor'. Our institution uses different terminology. What if we have a teaching aide in the course section providing feedback to students, is that okay?

ACCJC expects colleges to have policies and procedures related to the hiring of qualified personnel for their roles at the institution. ACCJC does not dictate the title of persons providing instructional content and relies on the institution to abide by its policies in accordance with Accreditation Standard 3.1.

5. How frequently does an instructor need to interact with students to qualify for regular interaction?

ACCJC relies on institutions to set their own policies and procedures in the context of their mission and expectations for particular programs or courses, as well as curriculum development processes that would identify what is appropriate given varying lengths of time and amount of content in any given course or competency.

6. My institution requires office hours for each course section; however, students do not always attend. Does just having office hours count for regular interaction (Part A of the definition for regular interaction)?

Yes, the Department of Education clarified this expectation as follows, “an institution meets the requirement for regular interaction between students and instructors by, in part, providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a scheduled and predictable basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency. This requirement could be met if instructors made themselves available at a specific scheduled time and through a specific modality (e.g., an online chat or videoconference) for students to interact about the course material, regardless of whether the students chose to make use of this opportunity or interact with the instructor at the scheduled time.”

7. My course section relies on a third-party vendor that automatically grades my students' quizzes and tests. Does providing these grades count as substantive interaction?

No, per the Department of Education, “a grade on an assignment alone does not qualify as substantive interaction” unless the instructor evaluates the student's work and provides specific feedback to the student about that work. The Department specifically notes, “an automated grading system that provides feedback based on a programmed response to input does not count as ‘substantive’ because it is interaction with a computer, not an instructor.”

8. Should the course section sample reflect the overall institutional percentage mix of asynchronous and synchronous 100% online classes?

The sample should be randomly selected from all course sections offered at the institution that qualify as Distance Education, per the ACCJC *Policy on Distance and on Correspondence Education*. This includes synchronous and asynchronous courses, and any other methods where the instructor is physically separated from students. If a course section includes any instruction in a physical, in-person setting, those courses should be eliminated from the sampling process. *Non-instructional in-person requirements (e.g., orientation and testing) do not exclude a course or program from being classified as exclusively Distance Education.*

9. How should my institution conduct the random sample?

Institutions can work with their research staff to identify the random sample, or they can use something like the ‘Random Number’ function in Excel to identify a subset of courses listed in a spreadsheet. Once identified, they can work with their LMS Administrator or other appropriate staff, such as information technology personnel, to make the courses available to the peer reviewers.

10. As a peer reviewer, I am observing class sections that have substantive interaction per the two methods required, and the regular interaction expectations. However, the substantive and regular interaction appears to be mostly at the ‘initial level’. What should I do?

If you have observed that there is substantive and regular interaction in 85% or more of the course sections you reviewed (even if mostly at the Initial level per the *Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education*) then you may reflect on the rubric and provide feedback to the college to assist them with deepening and strengthening the quality of substantive and regular feedback (either in the narrative of the report or with a Recommendation for Improvement if this review occurs during the Focused Site Visit).

11. Why doesn't ACCJC monitor student-to-student interaction? I don't see any reference to it in the *ACCC Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education*, or in the *Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education*, or other ACCJC resources.

ACCJC is required to monitor quality in distance education per the federal regulations on this matter and does not ensure compliance with other State laws or regulations (such as ADA compliance) not within its jurisdiction.

12. My institution is concerned about violating Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and does not feel comfortable providing access to distance education courses.

According to the Department of Education, an educational institution is permitted to disclose student records to accrediting organizations to carry out their accrediting function.