Regular, Effective and Authentic Contact

When you design your course, keep the following suggestions in mind to established **Regular, Effective and Authentic Contact**:

Instructors need to make certain that there are measures for instructor-initiated effective regular authentic contact incorporated into online and hybrid course design and delivery.

Regular, effective and authentic contact means that instructors must keep in contact with students on a consistent and timely basis to both ensure the quality of instruction and verify their performance and participation status. Lack of activity in the course, such as in the LMS or third-party websites, indicates a lack of regular and effective contact.

Establishing and maintaining regular, effective and authentic contact is an important aspect of delivering an online and hybrid course. It is not only a Title 5 requirement, but is also a practice that encourages and facilitates student-centered instruction and increases student-learning outcomes. Therefore DE courses cannot be offered in a self-paced format.

Initiated Interactions
• Include substance for all types of interaction in the course design.
• Utilize appropriate media for accessibility.
• Design daily or weekly assignments and projects that promote collaboration among students.
• Model course netiquette at the beginning of the semester with instructor-guided introductions. Netiquette – A term derived from 'network' and 'etiquette' which refers to the appropriate manners and protocol for communication in online interactions.
• Pose questions in the discussion boards which encourage various types of interaction and critical thinking skills among all course participants.
• Monitor content activity to ensure that students participate fully and discussions remain on topic.
• Create a specific forum for questions regarding course assignments.
• Ask students for feedback about the course on a regular basis and revise content

Frequency & Timeliness of Interactions
• Establish guidelines for frequency of contact that are the same as in the face-to-face classroom.
• Make known response time for student questions/inquiries and assignment feedback (e.g. 1-2 business days).
• Maintain an active daily presence, particularly during the beginning weeks of a course.
• Give frequent and substantive feedback throughout the course.

Expectations for Interactions
•   Specify course policy regarding frequency and timeliness of all contact initiated by the instructor in the syllabus.
•   Explain course policy regarding student-initiated contact (where to post questions, assignments, etc.) in the syllabus.
•   Outline and explain netiquette in initial course documents.
•   Clarify important dates, such as assignment and assessment deadlines not only in the beginning but also throughout the course.

Absences from Interactions
•   Inform students immediately of course designee should an illness, family emergency or other unexpected event prevent continuing regular effective contact for a prolonged period of time.
•   Let students know when instructor-initiated regular effective contact will continue.

What this means for distance education?

Interaction in the distance education classroom must take place in four ways **every week**: 1. Instructor-Student 2. Student-Student 3. Student-Content 4. Student-Interface.

The following are examples of how to implement weekly interaction in the distance education classroom:

Instructor-Student Examples:
•   Personalized feedback
•   Interactions in discussion boards
•   Chat/IM
•   Synchronous Sessions / Videoconferencing
•   Flipped Classroom Instruction
Student-Student Examples:
•   Messaging via the LMS
•   Discussion boards
•   Chat/IM
•   Synchronous/Asynchronous Document Editing
•   Collaborative projects: group blogs, wikis
Student-Content Examples:
•   Modules on the LMS
•   Lectures (recorded/streaming)
•   Podcasts/webinars/screencasts
•   Videoconferencing/CCCConfer
•   Discussion boards
Student-Interface Examples (within Canvas):
•   Computer hardware
•   Internet browsers
•   Software applications
•   Modules on the LMS
•   Discussion boards