REGULAR AND EFFECTIVE CONTACT POLICY

In fully online and hybrid courses, regular and effective contact from the instructor ensures that students receive the benefit of consistent instructor presence as a provider of course content and instructional information, and as a facilitator of student learning. In addition, regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and students affects retention, success, student authentication, financial aid, and college accreditation. Therefore, Porterville College sets forth this policy that provides procedures to help guide instructors in maintaining this crucial element in their courses.

DEFINITIONS

"Distance education" (DE) refers to any course for which some or all of the specified contact hours are not regularly scheduled, that uses one or more technologies to provide instruction to students, and in which there is regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and students.

"Fully online courses" are DE courses in which none of the contact hours are regularly scheduled.

"Hybrid courses" are DE courses in which some but not all of the contact hours are regularly scheduled.

INSTRUCTOR-INITIATED CONTACT

Federal and state regulations specifically call for regular, instructor-initiated contact with students in distance education courses. This makes sense, of course, as it is not only important for the instructor to continuously facilitate the learning activities in the course, but students are also at times unwilling, unsure, or confused about contacting the instructor even though they may be in academic crisis.

Instructor-initiated contact may occur in a number of different ways and for a variety of reasons. Some common reasons include:

- An academically related reminder to the whole class.
- Encouragement to a specific student who is struggling.
- Checking in with a student who is late in submitting work.
- Pointing out and further encouraging exemplary work from a student.
- Holding live office hours, or a live exam preparation session.

Because this is a federal and state mandate, there are instances in which the college must prove that this interaction is occurring. Therefore, it is very important that the instructor-initiated contact be documented within the district approved learning management system (LMS). In order for this to occur, instructors in both fully-online and hybrid courses are required, at a minimum, to do one of the following:

1. Use the class announcement feature of the approved LMS twice each week to send a notice about an academically related issue to the class.

2. Use a tool outside the approved LMS twice each week to send a notice about an academically related issue to the class. Then repeat those notices using the announcement feature of the approved LMS.
3. Use a tool outside the approved LMS twice each week to send a notice about an academically related issue to the class. Then take a screenshot of those notices, being sure that they clearly show the date and the contents of the message, and upload the screenshot to the "Files" area of the course, placing them within a folder labeled "Class Announcements."

STUDENT TO STUDENT INTERACTION

State regulations also require that regular and effective interaction occur amongst students. Student-to-student interaction helps to foster active engagement with course concepts, and facilitates effective learning communities which has been shown to positively impact student success.

In meeting this goal, online and hybrid courses should promote regular student interaction that is tied to the learning outcomes. This might involve assigning collaborative projects, arranging discussion on course topics, promoting study groups, or other similar activities. As a reminder, all student-to-student interaction will occur within the approved course management system as per the KCCD Board Policy.

Students should be encouraged to regularly interact with their classmates throughout the course's term. The frequency of their interaction is beyond the complete control of instructors, and will vary from student-to-student. However, instructors should be able to document their attempt in promoting student-to-student contact.

ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS

Instructors should establish and make clear to students what the turn-around time is on student inquiries, as well as assignment feedback and grading. As per KCCD Board Policy, the maximum turn-around time on student inquiries should be no more than 48 hours, excepting weekends and holidays. In addition to turn-around time, it should be made clear to students how they can reach you, with at least two methods of contact delineated. Instructors should also explain their method(s) and frequency of communicating with students. All of these communication policies will be explained in the course syllabus. As a reminder, the course syllabus will be available to students within the approved course management system as per KCCD Board Policy.

UNEXPECTED INSTRUCTOR ABSENCE

If the instructor will be out of contact for any time not specified in the course documents, the instructor will notify students of the loss of contact and when they can expect regular contact with the instructor to resume. If the instructor's absence will exceed three instructional days (excluding weekend and holidays), then the instructor will submit an absence report so that a substitute can be assigned.

GUIDING POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

The California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Division 6, Chapter 6, Subchapter 3, Article 1 states the following:

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, and among students, either synchronously or asynchronously, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities. Regular effective contact is an academic and professional matter pursuant to sections 53200 et seq.

KCCD Board Policy Manual:

Procedure 4B3

The faculty member teaching an online or hybrid (face-to-face and online credit instruction) course shall engage in regular and effective student contact:
a. Respond to student questions, emails, and other communications within 48 hours, Saturdays, Sundays, non-instructional days and leave days excepted;
b. Regularly (at least twice a week) initiate contact with students in the online classroom;
c. Monitor student-to-student interaction in classroom activities requiring interaction;
d. Select and incorporate some combination of the following student authentication strategies to verify student identity or authenticate the originality of work:
   1. *Use proctors for tests and require id's.*
   2. *Use an originality tool to prevent plagiarism.*
   3. *Become familiar with students' individual writing styles by requiring a variety of writing tasks, such as discussion forums, paragraph-length answers on exams, and formal research papers.*
   4. *Require specific research paper topics for which the instructor knows the secondary sources thoroughly.*
   5. *Employ a lock-down browser system, to prevent students from exiting the exam and surfing the web for answers.*
   6. *Design test questions to be randomly drawn from the banks of questions and shuffled so that each student gets a different set of questions.*
   7. *Design tests to be open-book but with a limited amount of time to complete.*
   8. *Require forced completion of exams so student cannot re-enter a test.*
   9. *Set a short window for testing completion, ie., one or two days to take an exam rather than a week.*
   10. *Create a unique password for each exam*

e. Provide information to student regarding items 1-4 above on the class syllabus.
f. The faculty member teaching an online or hybrid course shall include all course syllabus information as described in the CCA contract within the District's adopted class management system and likewise shall conduct all discussion forums, wikis, and other student-to-student class interactivity entirely within the class management system.

CONCLUSION

By adopting this regular and effective contact policy, Porterville College aims to ensure that students enrolled in distance education classes experience the same quality and amount of support from instructors, as well as the opportunity to collaborate amongst their peers, as those enrolled in on-campus classes. The only difference will be the way in which contact occurs. Ultimately, regardless of instructional modality, students remain the focus at Porterville College as we commit to ensuring an excellent educational experience.

Porterville College wishes to acknowledge and thank Antelope Valley College, Mira Costa College, and Cypress College for providing guiding documents and verbiage as we developed this policy.