Policy 2.13

Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI)
An Overview for APSU Faculty

Introduction:

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is a requirement that all APSU online & hybrid courses must meet. RSI is defined in a federal regulation that distinguishes the difference between correspondence and distance education. Regular interaction refers to the frequency with which students and instructors communicate, while substantive interaction refers to the quality and depth of the communication. Both types of interaction are essential for creating a sense of community, promoting learning, and ensuring that students stay engaged and motivated throughout the course or program. Faculty are encouraged to use this resource and/or the Department of Distance Education to determine if their teaching practices meet the federal requirements of RSI.

An institution ensures ***regular interaction*** between a student and an instructor by:

- Providing 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.
- 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.

+

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least ***two*** of the following:

- Providing direct instruction
- Assessing and/or providing feedback on a student's coursework
- Providing information and/or responding to student questions about the course content
- Facilitating a group discussion regarding course content or competency
- Other instructional activities approved by SACSCOC

Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI)
An Overview for APSU Faculty

Characteristics of RSI

Initiated by a Qualified Instructor

Interactions with students should be initiated by someone who meets SACSCOC (and programmatic accreditor if applicable) faculty credentialing standards. The instructor should take an active role in initiating and guiding a range of interactions with their students throughout the course. This ensures that interactions are an integral part of the instructional plan for the course and are not optional. Overall, interactions in the course should be initiated by the instructor.

Examples & Nonexamples:

- ✓ You post a discussion question and actively facilitate the conversation by asking clarifying questions and providing examples.
- ✓ You ask a student to meet with you during your office hours or schedule a video call with the student.
- ✓ You post an announcement addressing prevalent misconceptions in the prior unit.
- ✗ You post a discussion question and assign a grade for those who participate.
- ✗ A student submits a quiz or assignment that is automatically graded by the LMS.
- ✗ A student emails you with a question about an assignment.

Frequent and Consistent

Interactions with students should be reasonably frequent and consistently repeated throughout the course. Once a course begins, extended periods of time should not pass between interactions the instructor initiates with students. The mode and type of interactions may vary throughout the course, depending on the needs of students and the goals of the instructor, but the regular opportunities for interactions should be consistently provided for the duration of the course.

Examples & Nonexamples:

- ✓ You post weekly announcements that answer common questions, summarize class progress, and discuss relevant course content.
- ✓ You hold synchronous online review sessions every other week and post the recordings for those unable to attend.
- ✓ You use email to regularly communicate with students about relevant course content.
- ✗ You send a welcome message during the first week of class and a follow-up message at the halfway mark.
- ✗ You encourage students to participate in a one-time online review session before the final exam.
- ✗ You inconsistently post announcements as due date reminders.

Characteristics of RSI (continued)

Meaningful and Academic

Interactions should be connected to the subject of the course and contribute to the students' progress toward course, program, or college learning objectives. Procedural interactions, such as posting reminders for deadlines, are not substantive on their own. Please keep in mind that this does not mean interactions designed to welcome students or build community are not important, merely that they are not sufficient by themselves. Overall, most of the interactions should be relevant to the course material and concepts.

Examples & Nonexamples:

- ✓ You post a prerecorded video explaining concepts and posing guiding questions for the upcoming unit that require student responses.
- ✓ You post a relevant example or explanation to the discussion board for students to see and respond to.
- ✓ You provide personalized feedback on a student's assignment or whole-class feedback on frequently missed questions.
- ✗ You post a prerecorded video about the main concepts for the current unit.
- ✗ You post on a course discussion board that students need to reply to a classmate by the due date.
- ✗ You email students the course attendance policy.

Proactive Monitoring

The instructor should monitor student progress and regularly engage with students to keep everyone on track and support student success. Expectations for instructor-student communication and interaction should be clearly defined in the syllabus or a communication policy document.

Examples & Nonexamples:

- ✓ You define the response time for feedback and emails in your syllabus or communication policy.
- ✓ You create a specific discussion forum for questions and monitor it regularly.
- ✓ You contact students with missing assignments, poor performance, and/or those who are not participating in course activities.
- ✗ You do not respond to a student's email and instead post the response as an announcement.
- ✗ You provide a generic statement in your syllabus that feedback and help will be provided.
- ✗ You post students' grades infrequently and/or irregularly (e.g. at midterms & during finals).

Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI)
An Overview for APSU Faculty

RSI Self-Assessment

Use this checklist to identify regular and substantive interactions in your online course(s).
Some common examples are provided for you; blank rows are left for you to add your own regular & substantive interactions.

Your Interaction	Regular	Substantive	Do you do this in your course?	
You regularly post announcements regarding course content and assignments (consisting of more than just due date reminders).	Happens on a recurring basis (e.g. weekly)	Addresses course content & assignments	❑ Yes	❑ No
You provide timely, individualized feedback on student work throughout the duration of the course.	Feedback time expectations are defined in syllabus and/or a communication policy	Is individualized and academic in nature (not just "good job")	❑ Yes	❑ No
You actively participate in and facilitate discussion boards throughout the course.	Happens on a recurring basis (e.g. weekly)	Asks questions, summarizes students' posts, etc.	❑ Yes	❑ No
			❑ Yes	❑ No
			❑ Yes	❑ No

References & Additional Resources:

Negotiated rulemaking for higher education 2018-19. (2020, November 6). U.S. Department of Education. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2018/index.html

Poulin, R., & Davis, V. (2019, April 23). *Interpreting what is required for "Regular and substantive interaction"*. WCET Frontiers. https://wcetfrontiers.org/2016/09/30/interpreting-regular-and-substantive-interaction/

Regular and substantive interaction: An overview for instructors of online courses at Everett Community College. (n.d.). Everett Community College. https://www.everettcc.edu/files/programs/elearning/Regular_and_Substantive_Interaction_Primer.pdf

Regular and substantive interaction: Definitions of distance education and correspondence courses. (n.d.). SUNY Empire State College. https://www.esc.edu/dlis/design-your-course/regular-and-substantive-interaction/

U.S. Department of Education issues final rules on distance education and innovation | NC-SARA. (2020, October 1). NCSARA. https://nc-sara.org/news-events/us-department-education-issues-final-rules-distance-education-and-innovation

Distance Education

McReynolds 216
Mon-Fri, 8:00-4:30

online@apsu.edu
931-221-6625