

Regular and Substantive Interaction Policy

New U.S. Department of Education regulations for distance (online) education require **regular and substantive interaction** between students and their instructors. The phrase “regular and substantive interaction” comes from the federal definition of distance education. While regular and substantive interaction is specifically mentioned in the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of distance education, it is applicable to any class regardless of instructional modality (synchronous or asynchronous).

While this is a federal requirement, MSU Billings, as a leader in distance education in Montana, has long realized that the interaction between faculty and students is the hallmark of quality education. We have both a legal and ethical responsibility to provide quality interaction with our students.

Regular and Substantive Interaction has three elements: 1) It must be initiated by the instructor; 2) it must be frequent and consistent; 3) it must be focused on the course subject.

Faculty teaching online courses are responsible for complying with this policy and its associated federal regulations. Faculty teaching online courses are responsible for ensuring their courses are designed to facilitate regular and substantive interaction between instructors and students. Faculty may consult with the Center for Teaching and Learning to ensure that their online courses meet the above regular and substantive interaction requirements.

Each department or academic unit is responsible for ensuring instructors who teach online courses in their department comply with this policy.

Definitions of Regular and Substantive Interaction

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

1. Providing direct instruction;
2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework;
3. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
4. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
5. Other instructional activities approved by the institution’s or program’s accrediting agency.

Regular interaction requires the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student *on a predictable and regular basis* commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency. The instructor is responsible for *promptly and proactively* engaging in substantive interaction with the student.

Examples of Regular and Substantive Interaction

1. Participation in regularly scheduled learning sessions where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the student and the qualified instructor.
(Note: merely logging into class is insufficient without further participation.)
2. Provide personalized comments (in any medium) for an individual student's assignment or exam.
3. Actively facilitate an online discussion.
4. Post-assessment debriefings based upon class performance.
5. Provide an overview video to accompany recorded lectures.
6. Use of small working/study groups that are moderated by the instructor.

Examples of What is Not Considered Regular and Substantive Interaction

1. Assignment of recorded webinars, videos, and reading materials without instructor-initiated interaction.
2. Contact with instructors not related to the course subject matter.
3. Adding numeric grades to the course gradebook
4. A student submits a quiz that is automatically graded.
5. Reminding students of the course attendance policy.
6. Posting an announcement about an upcoming assignment deadline.
7. Providing an open-ended online forum that is not moderated by the instructor.