

Definition

“Distance education” (DE) means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor(s) and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and instructor(s) either synchronously or asynchronously.

Technologies that may be used to offer distance education include the following:

- (1) The Internet;
- (2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- (3) Audio conference; or
- (4) Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above.

The definition of “distance education” does not include correspondence courses.

Courses in which the instructional time may be conducted in part or in whole through distance education are subject to the approval procedures described below. Course sections in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education must follow all standards described below.

Course Approval

Each proposed or existing course offered by distance education shall be reviewed and approved separately via an addendum to the course outline of record. Separate approval is mandatory if any portion of the classroom instruction in a course, or an entire section of a course, is designed to be provided through distance education. The addendum must address the following:

- How course outcomes will be achieved in a distance education mode;
- How the portion of instruction delivered via distance education provides regular and substantive interaction between instructors and students; and
- How the portion of instruction delivered via distance education meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The review and approval of new and existing distance education courses shall follow the curriculum approval procedures outlined in Administrative Procedure 4020, Program and Curriculum Development and in the Courses and Programs Committee (CPC) Handbook. Distance education courses shall be approved under the same conditions and criteria as all other courses, subject to the certification standards described in the following section.

Certification

When approving distance education courses, the CPC will certify the following:

- A. Course quality standards: The same standards of course quality are applied to distance education classes as are applied to onsite classes.
- B. Course quality determinations: Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education courses are made in accordance with all CPC course-approval criteria and procedures.
- C. Instructor preparation: By proposing a distance education course, the faculty author, department chair, and dean agree that instructors assigned to teach a distance education course section should be prepared to teach distance education in accordance with ACCJC instructor qualifications, Title 5 requirements, any department and college procedures, and negotiated agreements.
- D. Regular and substantive interaction: Each section of a course in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education will include regular and substantive interaction between instructor and students. Regular and substantive interaction among students in course sections which include distance education may be required in the DE addendum to the course outline of record. By proposing a distance education course, the faculty author and department chair agree to the following specifications of instructor/student interaction and interaction among students (if required in the course's DE addendum).
 1. Instructor-initiated interaction: The instructor serves as both a provider of instruction and as a facilitator of student learning. Ensuring regular and substantive instructor/student interaction guarantees that the student has the opportunity to benefit from the instructor's presence in the learning environment.
 - a. Types of interaction. Instructors will use a variety of means to initiate substantive and effective interaction with students, including several from among the following:
 1. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency (e.g., weekly announcements, "Questions for the Instructor" forums, and responding to student emails, phone calls, and postings in a timely manner).
 2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework (separate from or in addition to an automated grading system).

3. Facilitating group discussions regarding the content of a course or competency (e.g., a threaded discussion forum or video conference with instructor participation).
 4. Providing direct instruction, such as instructor-prepared synchronous or recorded lectures, or introductions to educational resources (e.g., publisher-created materials, Open Educational Resources, library materials, or other materials freely available online) that, combined with other course materials, create the virtual equivalent of an onsite course section.
 5. Other instructional activities approved by the ACCJC.
- b. Frequency and opportunity of interaction. The frequency of instructor/student interaction in a DE section will be at least the same as would be established in its onsite counterpart. This interaction shall be distributed in a manner that ensures instructor/student interaction is maintained over the course of a week and the duration of the term and should occur as often as is appropriate for the course section. The opportunities for instructor/student substantive interactions are to be predictable and scheduled.

An instructor- and/or department-established policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor-initiated interaction and instructor feedback, and the expectations for student participation in student-to-student interaction, are to be posted in the syllabus and/or other course documents made available to students when the course section officially opens each semester. This information will also refer students to the section in the college catalog on student rights and responsibilities.

- c. Proactive support. Instructors will regularly initiate interaction with students (see section C.1.a) to assess if students are doing the following:
1. Accessing and comprehending course material.
 2. Participating regularly in course activities.

Instructors are expected to periodically monitor students' engagement and success, and promptly and proactively initiate substantive interaction with students when needed on the basis of such monitoring and upon request by a student (e.g., reaching out during office hours). For example, an instructor could inform students who are struggling in the class (e.g., as identified by their exam performance) of the option to meet with the instructor onsite, via web conferencing or via telephone.

Providing students with an open-ended question forum, although appropriate, would need to be combined with more proactive means of support. Faculty office hours are not included as fulfilling the entirety of the regular and substantive interaction requirement and are a separate requirement.

- d. Academic performance. Regularly initiated interactions by the instructor in tandem with robust assessments offered frequently throughout the semester will create an environment of academic integrity that constitutes a means for the following:
 1. Monitoring satisfactory progress, defined as earning grades consistent with a final course grade of a “C” or “Pass.”
 2. Encouraging honest representation of one’s own work.
 3. Tracking students’ engagement and attendance, including being able to determine the last day of attendance for a student who drops or becomes inactive. Prior to the first census date, the instructor will initiate an activity that requires student participation, as a means of evaluating whether or not the student is a “No Show.”
2. Interaction among students: If required in the course’s DE addendum, the frequency of student-to-student interaction in a DE section will be at least the same as would be established in its onsite counterpart. Ensuring regular and substantive interaction among students provides the opportunity for the students to receive the benefit of peer interaction in the learning environment. Instructors will use a variety of means to enable student-to-student interaction, such as the following:
 - a. Threaded discussion forums and other asynchronous interaction tools.
 - b. Group projects.
 - c. Peer review activities.
 - d. Peer presentations.
 - e. Synchronous (live) online interactions.
 - f. Collaborative documents and other tools for knowledge-building and sharing.
3. Managing unexpected instructor absence: During a course section in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education, the instructor will notify students if the instructor will be out of contact beyond what is described in the syllabus and/or course documents. This notification will include when students can expect regular and substantive interaction to resume.

College policies should be followed when instructor absences require coverage by a substitute.

- E. Accessibility: Each section of a course in which the instructional time is conducted in part or in whole through distance education will comply with all applicable accessibility requirements. By proposing a distance education course, the faculty author and department chair agree that the course design and materials of each DE section of the course will be accessible to every student, including students with disabilities.
- F. Publicizing institutional support: The instructor shall help students in a DE course section to be aware of MiraCosta College support services and resources, especially those available online.

- G. Duration of approval: All distance education courses approved under this procedure will continue to be in effect unless substantive changes are made to their official course outlines of record.

Verification of Student Identity

Consistent with federal regulations pertaining to federal financial aid eligibility, the district must authenticate or verify that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The district will provide to each student at the time of registration a statement of the process in place to protect student privacy and estimated additional student charges associated with verification of student identity, if any.

The vice president of instructional services shall ensure the institution utilizes one or more of these methods to authenticate or verify student identity:

- A. Secure multi-factor authentication including complex password to access MiraCosta College student information and course management systems.
- B. Proctored examinations.
- C. New or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

Student Support Services

The college will assure that distance learners have access to student support services that are comparable to those services provided to on-campus learners.

Equity

MiraCosta College acknowledges that equity gaps for some disproportionately impacted student populations have historically been even larger for DE course sections compared to onsite. Informed by data and guided by values rooted in pedagogy, excellence, equity, diversity, inclusion, and community, the college takes institutional responsibility for closing equity gaps and committing resources in support of approaches that do so. These approaches include equity-minded provision of online technologies, instruction, student services, professional learning, and research and innovation.

Accessibility

“Accessible” means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability. Although this might not result in identical ease of use compared to that of persons without disabilities, it still must ensure equal opportunity to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by the technology and equal treatment in the use of such technology.

The college will assure that all institutionally provided technology resources used in support of distance education will meet the accessibility requirements in state and federal regulations (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, California Government Code section 11135, and Title 5 sections 55200 and 55205).

Publication of Distance Education Course Section Facts

The college shall make available to students through college publications all the following facts before they enroll in a distance education course section:

- A. All online and in-person synchronous meeting days/dates and times.
- B. Any required asynchronous in-person activities.
- C. Any required technology platforms, devices, and applications.
- D. Any test or assessment proctoring requirements.