

Best Practices in Online Instruction and Design

A Handbook for Student Success in the Online Environment

North Carolina Community College System

First Edition



The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) understands the importance of providing equal access to high-quality instruction to all students regardless of their geographic location. We recognize that to achieve our mission to *“open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education and maximize student success,”* we must address online instruction holistically.

This handbook will provide community college faculty guidelines for best practices in online instruction and design to address the consistency of high-quality online instruction throughout North Carolina. The United States Department of Education requires regular and substantive interaction in the online environment; however, the purpose of this manual is not simply to comply with the DOE Regulations but to go above and beyond for our community college students.

Table of Contents

Overview of Department of Education Requirements of Regular Interaction and Substantive Interaction in Distance Learning Courses	4
Introduction of RSI	4
Review of Legislation Concerning RSI	4
34 CFR 600.2	4
Best Practices in Addressing RSI	5
Importance of RSI Compliance.....	9
Lead Authors of Overview of RSI	10
Establishing a Welcoming Environment in the Online Class.....	12
Introduction	12
Implementation Examples and Strategies	12
Additional Resources	14
Lead Authors of this Topic	14
Best Practices in HyFlex Instruction.....	15
Introduction	15
HyFlex Key Terms and Concepts	16
Pedagogical Implications of HyFlex Instruction	16
HyFlex Student and Instructor Interactions.....	16
Summary	18
Lead Authors of this Topic	18
Faculty’s Roles and Responsibilities -- Americans with Disabilities Act and Accommodations.....	19
Defining ADA.....	19
Responsibilities as a Faculty Member.....	19
Disability Services.....	19
Student with a Disability Receive Accommodations	19
The Purpose of the Academic Accommodations.....	20
Academic Adjustments a Postsecondary School Must Provide.....	20
Identifying Students in a Class with Accommodations	20
Accommodations and the Integrity of Classes or Academic Programs	20
Other Steps Can Faculty Take	21
Resources	21

Promote Digital Employability Skills and a Positive Personal Digital Presence	22
Introduction	22
Online Implementation or Intervention	23
Summary	23
Strategies for Success	23
Lead Authors of this Topic	24

Overview of Department of Education Requirements of Regular Interaction and Substantive Interaction in Distance Learning Courses

Introduction of RSI

This document reviews the legislative requirements, gives examples of best practices to meet the requirements, and provides strategies for success in meeting the Department of Education's (ED) July 2021 regulations for distance education. The information provided below is compiled from Federal Register Vol. 85, No. 171, Education documents, and results from discussions between all NC Community Colleges and the Department of Education. The document outlined below reflects our understanding of regulatory expectations. **All institutions must facilitate substantive interaction, regular instructor engagement, and monitor student engagement and success.** Our goal is to provide a high-level overview of the distance education regulations, best practices, and strategies to meet regular and substantive interactions set by the ED.

Review of Legislation Concerning RSI

New regulations published September 2, 2020, and enacted July 1, 2021, sought to clarify distance education definitions related to academic engagement and substantive interaction. The regulations are provided in their entirety in Distance Education and Innovation, 85 C.F.R. 54808 § 600.2 (2020). The information below is paraphrased and includes excerpts from the regulations.

34 CFR 600.2

Distance education is education that uses approved technologies (such as the College's learning management system) to deliver instruction to students who are **separated** from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously. An **instructor** is an individual **responsible for delivering course content** and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and 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.

An institution ensures **regular interaction** between a student and an instructor or instructors before the student completes a course or competency by:

1. 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; and
2. **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 based on such monitoring or upon request by the student.

Academic engagement is defined as **active participation by a student** in an instructional activity related to the student's course of study that includes but is not limited to:

- a. Attending a synchronous class, lecture, recitation, or field or laboratory activity, physically or online, where there is an opportunity for interaction between the instructor and students;
- b. Submitting an academic assignment;
- c. Taking an assessment or an exam;
- d. Participating in an interactive tutorial, webinar, or other interactive computer-assisted instruction;
- e. Participating in a study group, group project, or an online discussion that the institution assigns; or
- f. Interacting with an instructor about academic matters

Additional considerations from the Department of Education provided during the Federal Student Aid webinar on April 2021:

Essential concepts for distance education:

- Instructors must engage in at least two of the five forms of substantive interaction, meeting the regulatory requirements during each course or competency. The regulations **do not prescribe a specific frequency or combination of each type of interaction** except that they must be “predictable and scheduled.”
- Monitoring a student's “academic engagement and success” may include:
 - Evaluating a student's level of participation in synchronous class sessions
 - Monitoring the student's activity on course websites or materials;
 - Considering the quality of the student's coursework or understanding; or
 - Other forms of monitoring the student's engagement and success.

Best Practices in Addressing RSI

When requested to provide specific examples, Martin Gregory from the Department of Education declined to, stating, “An institution is expected to maintain academic policies or procedures that create expectations for faculty to substantively interact with students on a predictable and scheduled basis and to monitor each student's engagement and success and follow up with the student as needed.”

Therefore, the examples provided below are not meant to define the types of course content required in distance education courses. Instead, they are examples of course resources and learning activities frequently found in a distance education course that complies with distance education regulations.

Course Syllabus: Before the course begins, set clear expectations for the student and the instructor and document these expectations within the syllabus. The syllabus serves as documentation for regular interaction and identifies substantive interaction opportunities by providing the following information:

- **Instructor information** provides contact information, office hours, expected response time, and instructor availability.
- **Course schedule** provides a timeline of the review of course materials, the completion of course learning activities, and specifically identifies the opportunity for substantive interaction in the course.
- **Academic engagement requirements** identify student participation expectations within the learning activities and suggest how the student can succeed within the course.
- **Grading statement** defines how the student's learning activities will be assessed, how and when grading and feedback are delivered, and how the student's overall grade for the course is calculated.

The syllabus is the first step, as it identifies the expectations for the course. The course content and facilitation must align with the expectations identified in the syllabus. The course content will serve as evidence of regular interaction and substantive interaction in a distance education course, including but not limited to:

Proactive, frequent, and consistent interactions initiated by the instructor go beyond simple course announcements. Exchanges are considered to occur regularly if they occur on a predictable and regular basis. The interactions should be frequent, follow the course's flow, and align with the course structure. For example:

- A **weekly announcement** (written, audio, or video) to tackle upcoming challenging materials.
- **Instructional materials** (lectures, handouts, videos, publisher content, etc.) are posted and released according to the course schedule to provide direct instruction and promote the student-to-content academic engagement.
- **Muddiest Point** discussion boards provide a virtual space for a student to post a message in a public space. The instructor responds in a timely manner to address the specific concern or question posed by the student. This type of discussion board may not meet the substantive interaction definition; it does provide an opportunity for regular and predictable interaction with an instructor about academic or course matters.
- **Summarize trends** from learning activity assessment and provide specific suggestions that a student can take on future learning activities to improve performance.
- **Individual student interactions** as part of monitoring academic engagement, academic performance, or reminding students of responsibilities to complete the course successfully.

Interactive virtual meetings provide an opportunity for students to ask questions, seek clarification, and obtain supplemental instruction on course content. Virtual meetings (for **office hours** or **class sessions**) are scheduled at specific dates/times and are documented on the course syllabus. Within the class session virtual meetings, intentionally create **small breakout groups** to facilitate student-to-student interaction and create a sense of community within the course. The instructor monitors each small group and regularly interacts with the discussion.

Learning activities with grading and feedback are vital in determining if the student was successful in a course. Most learning activities provide evidence of regular interaction in a course, but how learning activities are formed, facilitated, and assessed will determine if the learning activity meets the definition

of substantive interaction. Therefore, the information explicitly addresses learning activities that provide evidence of substantive interaction in your course. This information includes, but is not limited to:

Focus of content (course resources and learning activities) is the course subject and contributes to the student's progress toward meeting the learning objectives/outcomes for the course.

Initiated by the instructor to guide students through resources and learning activities within the course. This ensures that the interactions are an integral part of the course and contribute to the student's progress toward meeting the learning objectives/outcomes for the course.

Feedback for learning activities is one way in which you can provide evidence of substantive interaction within your course. Feedback and grading are not the same things.

- **Grading** assigns a value (in points or on a scale) to identify the student's performance on a learning activity.
- **Feedback** provides essential information about what the student did well and areas for improvement. Feedback includes the following components:
- Feedback is **timely** to allow students to use feedback to improve performance in subsequent learning activities.
 - **Ongoing** throughout the term to support learning and guide students to meet the learning objectives/outcomes of the course.
 - **Positive** comments on the **student's accomplishments** toward meeting the learning objective/outcome are provided.
 - **Areas that need improvements are** identified with concrete and tangible suggestions for actions the student can take to improve future performance.

Learning Activity Examples below are not meant to define specific learning activities required in a distance education course. Rather, here are two examples of learning activities frequently occurring in a distance education course.

Submitted an academic assignment (such as a file or online text) that contains the student's efforts for the learning activity (such as a term paper, project, or lab activity).

The learning activity **description and instructions** are clear and concise, with information on how to **complete** the learning activity and how the activity will be **assessed**. In the image below, a Moodle Assignment is used for this example. The **Description** of the activity identifies items such as the learning objectives/outcomes, how the activity will be assessed, and the steps necessary to complete the activity.

Grade: ✕

Document title
Course with section number and title at the top of the document. Title also includes year and term. Title matches the description from the NCCCS CCL.

Document title criterion remark

Well done. Providing the course info is important because in curriculum we receive requests from other colleges to look at the course syllabus to determine if transfer credit will be awarded. Since course descriptions change, giving a year, term, and section number to the document provides a time frame for the course.

/3 ✕

Assessment of the learning activity includes grades and **specific feedback** for the student's submission. Best practices in the assessment are using criteria-based assessment, such as a **rubric** or **grading/marking guide**. In the image below, a Moodle Grading guide is used to identify specific criteria, points per criteria, and detailed feedback on the student's efforts.

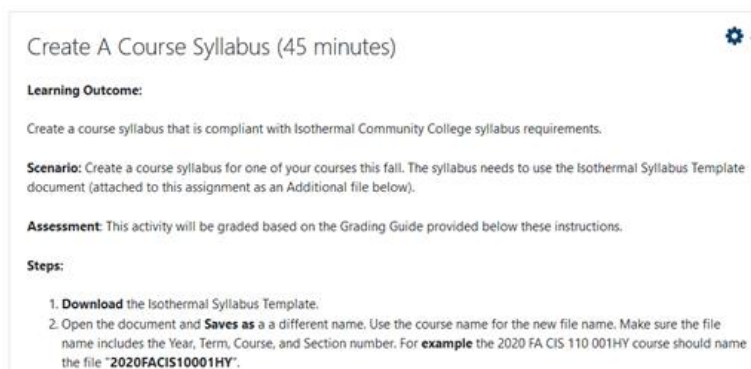
Online discussion activity allows the students and teachers to have an asynchronous conversation.

The learning activity **description and instructions** are clear and concise, with information on how to **complete** the learning activity and how the activity will be **assessed**. In the image below, a Moodle Forum is used for this example. The description of the activity identifies items such as the learning objectives/outcomes, how the activity will be assessed, and the steps necessary to complete the activity.



The instructor initiates and facilitates the discussion, focusing the message toward the specific learning objective(s). Instructor posts and responses should be timely and regular within the time constraints of the learning activity. An online discussion provides the opportunity for an asynchronous student-to-student conversation, but instructor presence in the discussion is critically important to meet the distance education regulations.

Assessment of the learning activity includes grades and **specific feedback** for the student's submission. Instructor engagement in an online discussion provides the student an opportunity to dig deeper into the course content and increase the student's interaction in the group discussion. In the example below, the instructor responds to a student's post and poses a question to push the student toward further exploration.



Re: 7. Share your agency information in this forum discussion (Due 9/10)
 Tuesday, September 7, 2021, 9:45 AM

I didn't know it was National Senior Center Month! I think the Meals on Wheels Program is so beneficial! It not only helps seniors to get nutrition that they may no longer be able to get or make for themselves, but it also enables the volunteers to check on the folks who are home bound where they can get them assistance if needed. How does one get started with this service?

Sum of ratings: Rate...

Permalink Show parent Edit Delete Reply Export to portfolio

Re: 7. Share your agency information in this forum discussion (Due 9/10)
 by [redacted] Wednesday, September 8, 2021, 7:10 PM

To get started with Meals on Wheels to can either sign up online or call 612-623-3363. Meals are available both on a long-term basis and temporarily if you are recovering from surgery or illness.

Sum of ratings: 10 (1) Rate...

Permalink Show parent Edit Delete Reply Export to portfolio

Teacher response to a student post that poses a question to further explore the topic.

Student response to the question posed by the instructor.

Importance of RSI Compliance

It's **effective teaching**. Research has long established that **teacher-student interactions are an essential component** of learning. For decades, faculty have participated in professional development for engaged learning techniques and instructor presence in a course. The Department of Education's requirement for regular and substantive interaction aligns with the current expectations held at many colleges.

The new regulations update the definitions of key terms that impact various aspects of higher education, including courses for which students use **Title IV funds (federal financial aid)**. This document focuses on the impact of these definitions on distance education courses. It is expected that upon review of a distance education course, evidence can be provided to document compliance with the new regulations. **Failure to meet the expectations** of distance education courses violates the funding requirements for receiving federal funding, such as Pell Grant and other financial aid monies. It may result in a loss of funding.

During a **program review**, the items reviewed by the Department of Education may include, but are not limited to:

- The institution's online instruction is delivered through an **appropriate form of media**;
- The instructors with whom students regularly and substantively interact **meet the requirements** of the institution's accreditor for instruction in the subject matter;
- Instructors engage in **at least two forms of substantive interaction** meeting the regulatory requirements for the course or competency;
- The course has **established scheduled and predictable opportunities** for substantive interaction between students and instructors; instructors monitor each student's engagement and substantively engage with students based on that monitoring, and instructors are responsive to students' requests for instructional support.

Strategy	Implementation
<i>Strategy 1</i>	Attend professional development activities that address items such as the Department of Education Regulations, building content within your learning management system (LMS), instructional design, and effective facilitation of online courses.
<i>Strategy 2</i>	Review the policies and practices at your college to ensure compliance with the College’s expectations of Distance Education courses. The policies and practices may include distance education course standards, course content creation, course delivery, assessment, and records retention practices for LMS content.
<i>Strategy 3</i>	Review your courses to determine if they meet the Department of Education requirements for Distance Education for regular interaction and substantive interaction.
<i>Strategy 4</i>	Revise/Create course content to address any issues identified during the course review.

Lead Authors of Overview of RSI

Brandon Hill
 Instructional Designer
 James Sprunt Community College

Jo James
 Coordinator of Technology-Enhanced Learning
 Isothermal Community College

Jennifer Jones
 Director of Distance Learning
 Alamance Community College

Gabrielle Rumley-Smith
 Director, Center for Teaching and Learning
 Rockingham Community College

References

Distance Education and Innovation, 85 C.F.R. 54808 § 600.2 (2020).

Distance Education and Innovation, 85 C.F.R. 54808 § 668.22 (2020).

Guidelines for Addressing Distance and Correspondence Courses. SACSCOC. (2020, September). Retrieved from <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2020/01/Guidelines-for-Addressing-Distance-and-Correspondence-Education.pdf>

Martin, Gregory, Director of Policy Development, Office of Postsecondary Education, US Department of Education. Questions posed by Katherine Davis, Director of Distance Learning and Change Management, North Carolina Community College System, 1 October, 2021.

Musser, D., & Martin, G. (2021, April). Distance Education and Institutional Eligibility: New Regulation Overview Webinar. Washington, DC; U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid.

U.S. Department of Education Issues Final Rules on Distance Education and Innovation. NC. (2022, February 8). Retrieved February 11, 2022, from <https://nc-sara.org/news-events/us-department-education-issues-final-rules-distance-education-and-innovation>

WCET Frontiers. (2021, August 25). Regular and substantive interaction refresh: Reviewing & Sharing Our Best Interpretation of current guidance and requirements. WCET Frontiers. Retrieved February 11, 2022, from <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2021/08/26/rsi-refresh-sharing-our-best-interpretation-guidance-requirements/>

Establishing a Welcoming Environment in the Online Class

Introduction

The first week in a new online course can be a daunting experience for the student. To provide the most significant opportunity for success, instructors should make attempts to do each of the following in their course:

- Humanize the instructor
- Establish a connection with the students
- Provide students with direction and support
- Participate in all activities

Implementation Examples and Strategies

Providing a few critical items at the beginning of an online course creates instructor presence and establishes rapport with the students. Examples may include:

- Welcome Message in LMS
- Welcome Email
- Jump Start the Course Interaction
- Personal Check-In
- Welcome Video
- Introduction/Navigation Video or Orientation Module
- Scheduled Synchronous Introductory Session(s)
- Icebreaker Forum
- Check the Pulse
- Student Video Introduction
- Support Information

Strategy	Implementation	Links to Examples (if Applicable)
<i>Welcome Message in the LMS</i>	A welcome message in the LMS should introduce the student to the course content, provide participation expectations, instructor contact info, materials needed, technical requirements, and how to get started. The welcome message should be concise; this is not the place to get in the weeds with many details.	University of Nebraska Omaha Example Online Course Welcome Messages
<i>Welcome email</i>	A welcome email can mimic the welcome message in the LMS, with additional information on how to access the LMS.	InterPro - Instructor Welcome Message: Creating a Positive Presence in Your Online Course – University of Wisconsin
<i>Jump Start the Course Interaction</i>	Email students before the course begins (more than once—e.g., two weeks before the course starts, then one week before it begins); in that pre-course intro email, faculty may want to	

Strategy	Implementation	Links to Examples (if Applicable)
	include a video welcoming students to class to provide a sense of the faculty member’s personality and social presence.	
<i>Personal Check-In</i>	When students haven’t entered the course in the first two-three days, consider reaching out to them through an additional form of contact (i.e., text message, personal email, phone call).	Google Voice is one example of a tool to use for texting students.
<i>Welcome Video</i>	Create a welcome video to humanize yourself as the instructor, establish a connection with the student, and ensure students that you care about their success and are there to provide support along the way. Best practice suggests that you write a script to guide the content of your welcome video.	ACUE Online Teaching Toolkit Tips for Creating a Welcome Video
<i>Course Navigation, Introductory Video, or Orientation Module</i>	A course navigation (tour) video will ensure students spend less time trying to locate course materials in your specific course and more time learning.	ACUE Online Teaching Toolkit Tips for Creating an online Orientation Video
<i>Scheduled Synchronous Introductory Session</i>	For those first-time online learners or students who need a little extra guidance, schedule an optional synchronous introductory session to answer questions and show students how to get started in your specific course.	COD Learning Technologies Best Practices for Synchronous Online Teaching and Learning
<i>Icebreaker Forum</i>	Icebreaker or Introduction forums have been around forever. Faculty should ask students specific questions (instead of “introduce yourself”), provide guidelines on length or word count, and include any other expectations for this and future discussions. Most importantly, the faculty should participate and reply to each student to set the stage for active participation in the course.	Icebreaker Ideas Compiled by Iowa State University Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
<i>Check the Pulse</i>	Incorporate the <i>affective</i> domain of learning by polling students with periodic check-ins to see how they are doing and initial impressions of a recent assignment. For example, if your class meets early in the week (Monday, Tuesday), ask them how their weekend went (e.g., “On a scale of 1-10, rate how well your weekend went?”) Similarly, a poll can be used to transition into a discussion about course material by asking a simple, general question such as “Which part did you find most interesting? What was one part of the reading that left you a little confused or that you have questions about?”	Mentimeter is one example of a free online polling tool.
<i>Student Video Introduction</i>	Instead of a text-based approach, have students post video introductions of themselves. As part of their introduction, ask students to share an example of a class they took that they found very rewarding and why.	

Strategy	Implementation	Links to Examples (if Applicable)
<i>Support Information</i>	Let students know that it is ok to ask for help and that you enjoy hearing from them. Provide examples of when they should contact the instructor and Technical Support (provide the contact info), and make them aware of Academic Support Resources available at your institution. aware of at your institution.	University of Minnesota College Success Open Library - Student Guidelines for Communicating with Instructors

Additional Resources

[ACUE Online Teaching Toolkit](#)

[University of Nebraska Omaha Keep Teaching Resources](#)

Lead Authors of this Topic

- Angela Herring, Director of Instructional Support Services, Wilson CC
- Stacy Reagan, Director, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Caldwell CC & TI
- Phil Tietjen, Director, Learning Design, Davidson-Davie CC

Best Practices in HyFlex Instruction

Introduction

The North Carolina Community College System Office recognizes that most definitions of delivery methods dictate where students must be physically located during a course throughout the semester. Traditional, Hybrid, and Blended require students to be on campus for a certain percentage of their course. Blended and Hybrid formats require students to participate in classroom and online activities or sessions; these courses are not designed to support students to be always online, always in the classroom, or both based on their weekly needs.

Hybrid Flexible (HyFlex) was identified as a delivery method that provides learners with increased flexibility. Dr. Brian J Beatty, who coined the term “HyFlex, states that *“Faculty do not have choices about participation mode since they must provide both an online and a classroom experience supporting student learning. This bi-modal approach with student freedom to choose mode and faculty requirements to provide both modes equally effective is the essential defining characteristic of a HyFlex design.”* Dr. Beatty also noted that *“HyFlex courses demand some appreciation for, and acceptance of, uncertainty as student participation mode changes from session to session and enrollment in each mode changes each session.”*

Additionally, the Educational Strategy Group’s publication, *Action Guide for Adult-Ready Transformation Program Change* (2021), noted that HyFlex courses create a multi-modal approach to instruction. Learners in one course have the option to choose in-person or online instruction. HyFlex is unique in that it allows learners to move between modalities based on their needs and what works best for them week to week. Equity is the foundation for this model since all learners have full access to the instructor, each other, and the learning resources.

In a HyFlex course, in-person and online activities coexist, reusing learning resources and assessments for all students while meeting the same learning outcomes. The North Carolina Community College State Board defines HyFlex instruction as *“A multi-modal instructional delivery method where the college has the option to deliver the online portion of a curriculum course synchronously, asynchronously, or both as long as 100% of the instruction is offered face to face with the instructor in a physical classroom. Students may choose to attend the regularly scheduled in-person session or the online option on a session-by-session basis.”*

Institutions may decide how to best address HyFlex based on their students’ needs and the institutional infrastructure. There is always an in-person component regardless of how an institution approaches HyFlex. Below are the three possibilities of HyFlex classroom offerings:

- Online synchronous instruction with an in-person class.
- Online asynchronous instruction with an in-person class.
- Online synchronous AND asynchronous instruction with an in-person class.

HyFlex Key Terms and Concepts

Term	Definition
In-Person	The instructor and student are in the same physical classroom and distance education technology is not required to facilitate live interactions.
Synchronous	The instructor and the learner are engaged in instruction on a regularly scheduled basis at the same time in different locations. The student and instructor may interact immediately via distance learning technology in a live setting.
Asynchronous	The student can interact with the content, assignments, and instructor at the time and place that the student chooses via a learning management system. There is not a designated time that the student or instructor must participate in a live setting. The instructor's role in online asynchronous is to provide regular and substantive interaction on a predictable basis.
Digital Divide	The differences in access to technology among different demographics and regions
Digital Bridge	Utilizing pedagogy and content delivery methods that decrease opportunities for inequalities related to access to information
Multimodal content	Sharing content using diverse approaches that appeal to multiple learning styles and modal preferences often using a variety of digital technologies

Pedagogical Implications of HyFlex Instruction

HyFlex courses should be designed intentionally to deliver content through multiple delivery methods; therefore, preparing for a HyFlex course may involve having two to three separate lesson plans for the same section. According to the Department of Education Distance Education Regulations addressed in this Handbook, recording a lecture and posting the recording of the lecture in the learning management system (LMS) will not suffice. In addition, streaming an in-person lecture live does not meet these standards if the remote students do not have an opportunity to ask questions and engage with their classmates. It does not serve students well, and it does not meet the standards of the Department of Education regulations.

HyFlex Student and Instructor Interactions

HyFlex instruction impacts students by increasing student choice. Students may engage in learning around work, family schedules, illness, or transportation issues. However, this does not mean the instructor cannot ask students where they plan to attend on a week-by-week basis so that the instructor may plan accordingly.

A course is HyFlex if students have the option to alternate between delivery methods throughout an academic term. The table below provides guidance on instructing students based on their preferred delivery method.

	In-Person Classroom	Online Synchronous	Online Asynchronous
Content	North Carolina Combined Course Library Learning Outcomes	North Carolina Combined Course Library Learning Outcomes	North Carolina Combined Course Library Learning Outcomes
Engagement	Lecture Collaborative groups Live Q&A interactions Paper handouts/notes	Zoom Lecture Breakout Rooms Chat Box – Q&A Digital handouts PPT Slides via LMS Web-based tools Encourage the student to turn on the webcam	Recorded lecture Include Chat dialogue from live sessions Digital Handouts PPT Slides via LMS Web-based tools
Assessment	Paper tests – Summative Paper worksheets Student Presentations Conversation – Formative	LMS Test LMS quizzes LMS Upload files Chatbox – Formative	LMS Test LMS Quiz Lecture/Video with embedded questions Discussion Forums Journals Assignment upload
Attendance	Students must be visibly present in-person or via webcam at the regularly scheduled class session.		Students must submit an assignment within the learning management system within the past seven days.
College Resources	Classroom space Data projector/Computer Paper and pencils	Classroom space Data project/Computer Meeting Owl or room camera. Online Student Facilitator	Learning Management System Faculty trained in online instruction and course design

Summary

HyFlex instruction increases options for students to attend college courses. The HyFlex delivery method leans on students to determine which delivery method meets their needs at any given time during an academic semester. Delivering content through multiple delivery methods simultaneously may be a challenge to faculty; however, with the implementation of best practices, this may lead to student retention and success.

Lead Authors of this Topic

Dr. Lane Freeman, Director of Online Learning, Programs and Services, NC Community College System

Franchesca Battle, Department Chair Digital Teaching & Learning, Nash Community College

Cris Harsman, Executive Director of IT, A-B Tech Community College

References:

“Action Guide for Adult-Ready Transformation Program Change.” Educational Strategy Group, Aug. 2021, https://edstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ESG_Adult_Ready_Playbook_Action_Guide_Program_Change_FINAL.pdf.

Beatty, Brian J. *Hybrid-Flexible Course Design*. EdTech Books, 2019. <https://edtechbooks.org/hyflex>.

Faculty's Roles and Responsibilities -- Americans with Disabilities Act and Accommodations

Defining ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law intended to stop discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Title II of the ADA applies to all public entities' programs, activities, and services. It applies to all state and local governments, departments, and agencies. Under Title II of the ADA, public colleges and universities must provide auxiliary aids and services to qualified students with disabilities. Providing auxiliary aids and services is not considered special treatment, but rather an equal opportunity to participate in the institution's services, programs, or activities.

Responsibilities as a Faculty Member

It is a shared responsibility among faculty, disability services staff, and administration to ensure that students with disabilities will have equal access to participate in postsecondary education without discrimination. For faculty members, that involves providing reasonable accommodations or auxiliary aids and services. This is one way to prevent discrimination. However, faculty members are not responsible for determining the specific accommodation type for each student with a disability. Disability services professionals recommend the accommodation which will be most effective in assuring the student's access to academic programs. Before providing accommodations for a specific course, the disability specialist carefully considers the nature of the student's disability and how this disability may affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate achievement in the course. It is essential for the disability services professional to work collaboratively with the faculty to determine reasonable accommodations and to ensure that the accommodations do not fundamentally alter the nature of a service, program, or activity, or that would result in an undue financial or administrative burden.

Disability Services

The North Carolina Community Colleges collaborate with faculty, staff, and students to make the college experience accessible to everyone. Our expertise is at the intersection of disability and design. Therefore, NC System Office work with all campus community members to ensure that physical, curricular, and web environments are designed to be barrier-free to the extent possible. They also work directly with students to determine accommodations when barriers cannot be removed in a timely manner. Providing access is a collaborative effort engaging the college's disability services, students, and the faculty/staff.

Student with a Disability Receive Accommodations

The first step the student must take is to self-identify disability status in a reasonable and timely manner to the disability services staff on campus. The student is responsible for meeting with the disability services staff for an initial meeting. Unlike K-12 school districts, postsecondary schools are not required

to identify a student as having a disability to assess their needs. At the initial meeting, the student needs to provide current disability documentation from a qualified professional that reflects the student's current disability status and how their disability limits participation in courses, programs, services, and activities. The student is also responsible for following published procedures for obtaining academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids and services.

The Purpose of the Academic Accommodations

Students with disabilities are capable individuals who may experience limitations that require the adaptation of materials, methods, or environments to facilitate learning and ensure equal access. Accommodations may also ensure that when students are evaluated, they can demonstrate what they learned rather than the effects of their disability.

Academic Adjustments a Postsecondary School Must Provide

The appropriate academic adjustment must be determined based on the student's disability and individual needs. Academic adjustments may include auxiliary aids and services and modifications to academic requirements to ensure equal educational opportunity. Examples of adjustments are arranging for priority registration; reducing a course load; substituting one course for another; providing note-takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, extended time for testing, and equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition, or other adaptive software or hardware.

Identifying Students in a Class with Accommodations

The notification practice may vary across the 58 community colleges. Still, it is common practice for disability services offices to notify faculty members of the accommodations that will be provided each semester. In some instances, the student may be responsible for notifying the faculty but must provide official documentation from disability services of the agreement and types of reasonable accommodations. Some accommodations, such as sign language interpreters, may be provided by the disability services office. In contrast, the faculty member may provide other accommodations, such as extended time for exams.

If a student asks a faculty to provide accommodations, but the faculty never received official notification from the disability services office, the faculty should direct the student to disability services to receive accommodations. The faculty member should never provide accommodations to students without proper documentation from disability services.

Please remember that students have a right to privacy in disability matters, and their confidentiality must be maintained. Faculty should file notices of accommodations in a secure place and never discuss a student's disability status and necessary accommodations in the presence of fellow students or others who have no educational need to know.

Accommodations and the Integrity of Classes or Academic Programs

No. When providing accommodation for students with disabilities, higher education institutions are not required to lower academic standards or compromise the school's or program's integrity. Essentially,

accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are provided to “level the playing field” for the student with a disability, enabling the student to compete with their peers. Once accommodations have been provided, the faculty should grade the work of a student who has a disability the same as the student without a disability. There is no need to give them a break by being unduly lenient. To grade students more harshly because they had extended time for exams would nullify the effect of the accommodations.

Other Steps Can Faculty Take

Faculty can ask a student to describe how they learn best. They cannot directly ask a student if they have a disability. Faculty can also make courses more disability-friendly by including information on the course syllabus that encourages students with disabilities to contact the disability services office for assistance in receiving accommodations and provide office location with specific contact information to assist students.

Resources

- [ADA](#)
- [Disability Services](#)
- [VLC online resources](#)
- [AHEAD](#)

Promote Digital Employability Skills and a Positive Personal Digital Presence

Introduction

The traditional on-campus college setting often requires students to step out of their comfort zones and develop skills that will help them transform into effective future employees. However, in many of our online course offerings, instructors do not challenge students to step out of their comfort zone and develop digital employability skills (soft skills). If properly designed, online courses can provide opportunities for students to develop as students as well as future employees.

The concept of “Personal Digital Presence” (PDP) encompasses a student’s entire digital footprint, personally and professionally. PDP can be defined as how well an individual represents themselves through text, social media, live web conferencing, and recorded video presentations. A positive PDP is a culmination of being an outstanding digital citizen and maintaining an appropriate digital footprint. Institutions of higher education must consider promoting a positive PDP among all students to prepare students for the 21st-century workforce.

Recently, college faculty have witnessed the 21st-century workforce landscape drastically shift. Employers and businesses interview candidates through Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, WebEx, and other video conferencing software. Additionally, employers are allowing employees to work from home offices and business meetings are conducted via webcams. The shift in how employers conduct interviews and establish remote office spaces has created a new set of skills needed by employees. These skills must be modeled and taught if colleges want to prepare students for the workplace.

Although many students are comfortable using electronic communications, many do not know what is culturally appropriate for the online classroom or professional setting. Students are often misinformed in believing a digital presence can be binary, where a person has a professional digital presence and then a separate and private digital presence. Although individuals may attempt to separate a personal and professional online presence, the two can never be separated. When employers look to hire or promote an employee, they do not just visit the candidate’s LinkedIn profile page; employers also research various social media platforms for appropriate behavior.

Online instructors will often notice students do not use proper netiquette (etiquette for the internet), such as students emailing in all capital letters, using cell phone texting language in emails, being sarcastic, and violating proper dress code during videos. When students are asked to post videos, students may wear pajamas, lingerie, or dress in a way that most students would not dress if attending an on-campus class. The online instructor’s role is to promote digital employability skills and train students on what is appropriate and inappropriate in a digital setting.

Students are often unaware of appropriate and inappropriate behavior because culture and society model inappropriate behavior. Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter often demonstrate what is *not* appropriate and professional in terms of a digital presence. Students have not been taught what behavior is inappropriate in a professional setting. When they attend college, the instructors may make inaccurate assumptions about students when the student has no awareness of their PDP. Online instructors must teach students to be good digital citizens in a safe learning environment that scaffolds the college student into the model digital citizen.

Suppose a student’s first experience using a web-conferencing tool is during a job interview. In that case, the student could be more anxious about the technology and the awkwardness of talking to a webcam than the interview questions. It could be the difference between the student being offered or denied the position, and it may have nothing to do with the type of employee the student would be.

Online Implementation or Intervention

Institutions should consider an intervention that includes outcomes focused on developing a positive PDP among students that fosters a good digital citizen with digital employability skills. Netiquette has often been approached with what is right or wrong in the online environment. However, community college faculty should focus on modeling appropriate digital behavior and correcting the inappropriate behavior instead of “punishing” students’ behavior.

Faculty should consider using written communication in their online courses and requiring live video conferencing and recorded video presentations. These different means of digital communication will provide students with an opportunity to apply digital skills in a safe learning environment. They will also offer faculty the opportunity to provide honest feedback on a student's PDP. Allowing students the opportunity to present in a non-text-based format also aligns with online best practices by differentiating instructional strategies to reach all learners.

Summary

In summary, college students may have limited exposure to a positive PDP. As the educational and work environment landscape shifts online, higher education institutions and online instructors must prepare students for a digital workforce. Higher education institutions should nurture a positive PDP and become a common standard across all college courses.

Strategies for Success

Strategy	Implementation
<i>Set the Stage</i>	Instructors should start the semester by informing students that they will be expected to communicate professionally to model the workforce expectations. Instructors should notify students through the syllabus and semester-welcoming messages that the instructor will provide feedback on all forms of communications from students. It is important to emphasize that feedback is not designed to be punitive but to increase student employability in the workforce.
<i>Social Contract</i>	Create a Social Contract that allows students an opportunity to post what is expected from their peers and their instructor in terms of communication. The social contract can be created using a Google Doc, Padlet, or other digital platforms that allow students to collaborate. Summarize the students’ comments and expectations into one document and have each student acknowledge they have read and agree to the terms of the social contract. A social contract increases student buy-in and provides the instructor a document to refer to when a student breaks social norms or expectations.

<i>Model</i>	<p>Online instructors should model professional communications when emailing or creating videos for students. For example, refer to students using proper prefixes such as Mr., Ms., or Mrs. when communicating with students. Instructors should use appropriate grammar and not “texting” language.</p> <p>Note: This does not mean that the instructor should not have a sense of humor; in fact, showing humor, compassion, and excitement is encouraged. As a professional, demonstrate how to adequately express emotions and tone in a professional setting.</p>
<i>Re-Modeling</i>	<p>When an instructor receives a communication from a student that is not professional, the instructor should “re-model” the communication. Re-modeling can be executed by reframing or rephrasing a student’s communication to make it professional. For example, if a student emails an instructor using “texting” language, the instructor may rewrite the email in a professional tone below the student’s original email.</p> <p>Note: It is essential to establish a positive relationship with students before doing this, or it will seem demeaning or elitist.</p>
<i>Address Inappropriate Communications Immediately</i>	<p>Although we want to use community college courses as an opportunity to help students understand how to communicate professionally, there may be some public posts (text, images, or videos) that need to be addressed immediately. Address the issue privately with the student and reference back to the syllabus or a social contract on the norms and expectations. Remember, students may not be aware what they have posted that their posted information is highly inappropriate, so assume the best. Approach this as a teachable moment.</p>
<i>Diversify Communication Types</i>	<p>Although it is best practice to allow students an option for submitting of how they may submit their work, instructors can also use a diversification of communication types to provide feedback on professional feedback on a variety of mediums. Written text is probably the most popular method of communication, but instructors should consider other options such as video. As mentioned above, students will be expected to know social norms and netiquette during recorded or live video sessions while in the workplace.</p>
<i>Scaffold Expectations</i>	<p>As the semester progresses, increase student communication expectations to meet professional standards. If the student’s communications are not improving, schedule a one-on-one session to discuss resources that may help in this area.</p>

Lead Authors of this Topic

Dr. Lane Freeman, NCCCS Director of Online Learning, Programs and Student Services Division

References

Freeman, R. L. (2020, April). *Promoting a positive personal digital presence among college students*. The NISOD Papers. Retrieved December 13, 2021, from http://www.nisod.org/archive_files/nisod-papers/TNP_16.pdf.