

# Distance Learning Faculty Handbook

Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines  
for Online Education



Learn more at <https://www.mtsac.edu/dlc/>

# Welcome & Introduction

Welcome, Distance Learning Faculty!

Online classes are beneficial for students and rewarding for faculty to each. They are also heavily regulated with unique expectations and processes. The Mt. San Antonio College Distance Learning Faculty Handbook has been created to inform faculty about the mandatory policies, procedures, and contractual obligations that relate to distance education courses; define best practices in course design and delivery within distance education and how those practices should be incorporated; and offer comprehensive resources for ongoing faculty development. This handbook was created by the DLC and will be updated regularly. This handbook serves as a resource to continue the knowledge and skills that Mt. SAC faculty demonstrated by completing SPOT (Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching) training.

## Whom Should I Contact?

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Questions regarding: stipends, pay, working conditions regarding online classes, office hours and load requirements for online professors	<a href="#">Faculty Association</a>  Article 13 of <a href="#">Faculty Contract</a>
<a href="#">Distance Learning Committee</a> (DLC) Membership	<a href="#">Academic Senate</a> President
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# Contacts & Online Resources

## Distance Learning Contacts

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## Distance Learning & Related Webpages

- [Distance Learning Committee](#)
- [Distance Learning Program](#)
- [AP 4105 on Distance Learning](#)
- [Distance Learning Program Faculty Resources](#)
- [Distance Learning Program Student Resources](#)
- Sign up for SPOT Training:
  - [Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching \(SPOT\)](#)
- Submit alternative certification:
  - [SPOT Equivalency \(SPEQ\)](#)
- Learn about SPOT Recertification and find approved courses:
  - [SPOT Recertification](#)
- Faculty SPOT Recertification due dates:
  - [SPOT-Certified Faculty](#)
- Submit new or updated DL Forms:
  - [DL Amendment Forms](#)
- [Approved DL Amendment Forms](#)
- [California Virtual Campus at Mt. SAC](#)
- [Faculty Contract](#)
  - Classroom Visitation Evaluations of Distance Learning Faculty - Form H.4.C
  - Student Evaluations of Distance Learning Faculty Form H.2.E
- [Faculty Center for Learning Technology](#)
- Library Guides:
  - [Copyright & Fair Use Guide](#)
  - [Open Educational Resources](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning](#)

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# Part 1: Definitions & Regulations

## Distance Education Definitions

“Distance education” means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by time and/or distance and interact through the assistance of technology. Distance education uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.

At Mt. San Antonio College, distance learning (DL) is the terminology used to denote distance education. A DL course is a course that has regularly scheduled replacement of seat time and is published accordingly in the Mt. SAC Schedule.

For local purposes, the following terms are defined as follows:

- **In-person courses:** A course with no seat time replaced with online instruction.
- **Online:** A course in which 100% of instruction takes place online with no mandatory face-to-face meetings or campus visits. Online courses can meet synchronously or asynchronously.
- **Hybrid/partially online:** A course that provides instruction both online and face-to-face with at least one mandatory in-person meeting. Mandatory meetings are regularly scheduled, and students are informed of mandatory meetings in the schedule of classes.
- **Synchronous instruction:** An online course in which instruction takes place in real-time, online meetings during regularly scheduled times.
- **Asynchronous instruction:** An online course in which no set class meeting times are required.

# Distance Education Regulations

Distance education is highly regulated by both Federal and State entities. Federal financial aid is only available to distance education, not correspondence, courses. Correspondence courses are courses in which interaction is primarily initiated by the student. Distance Education is regulated and defined by 34 CFR 600, 602, and 608 and Title 5 Sections 53200, 55005, 55200, 55202, 55204, 55206, 55208, 55370 et seq. Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) follows the Federal guidelines.

## Federal Regulations

Definitions are derived from the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 34 › Subtitle B › Chapter VI › Part 600 › Subpart A › [Section 600.2](#)

Distance education is defined as:

- 1) Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iv) of this definition 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.
- 2) Technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:
  - i. The internet;
  - ii. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
  - iii. Audio conference; or
  - iv. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition.
- 3) For the purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.
- 4) For the purposes of this definition, 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 -
  - i. Providing direct instruction;
  - ii. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
  - iii. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
  - iv. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency;
  - v. Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.
- 5) An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to a student's completion of a course or competency -
  - i. 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



- ii. 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.

The definition of correspondence education is found in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 34 › Subtitle B › Chapter VI › Part 600 › Subpart A › Section 602.3

Correspondence education means:

- 1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated by the instructor.
- 2) Interaction between the instructor(s) and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
- 3) If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course to be a correspondence course.
- 4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

## State Regulations

California Title 5 regulations were changed in 2021 to match federal regulations.

### *CCR Section 55200. Definition and Application*

“Distance education” 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.

The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

- i. The internet;
- ii. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- iii. Audio conference; or
- iv. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this subdivision.

The definition of "distance education" does not include correspondence courses.

"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.

### *CCR Section 55202. Course Quality Standards.*

The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a class conducted through distance education as are applied to in-person classes, in regard to the course quality judgment + pursuant to the requirements of section 55002, and in regard to any local course quality determination or review process. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 2 (commencing with section 53200) of chapter 2.

### *CCR Section 55204. Instructor Contact.*

- 1) Any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular and substantive interaction between instructor(s) and students, (and among students, if described in the course outline of record or distance education addendum), 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.
- 2) "Substantive interaction" means engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:
  - i. Providing direct instruction;
  - ii. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
  - iii. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
  - iv. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
  - v. Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.
- 3) Regular interaction between a student and instructor(s) is ensured by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency:
  - i. 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
  - ii. 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.
- 4) Regular and substantive interaction is an academic and professional matter pursuant to sections 53200 et seq.
- 5) For purposes of calculating instructional time in the context of asynchronous distance education, a week of instructional time is any week in which:
  - i. The institution makes available the instructional materials, other resources, and instructor support necessary for academic engagement and completion of course objectives;
  - ii. The institution expects enrolled students to perform educational activities demonstrating academic engagement during the week.

*CCR Section 55206. Separate Course Approval.*

- 1) If any portion of the instruction in a new or existing course is to be provided through distance education, the course outline of record or an addendum to the official course outline of record shall address how course outcomes will be achieved in a distance education mode and how the portion of instruction delivered via distance education meets the requirement for regular and substantive interaction between instructors and students, specified in section 55204.
- 2) The course design and all course materials must be accessible to every student including students with disabilities. The distance education course outline of record or addendum shall be approved according to the district's adopted curriculum approval procedures.

At Mt. SAC, this addendum is called the Distance Learning (DL) Course Amendment Form.

*CCR Section 55208. Faculty Selection and Workload*

- 1) Instructors of course sections delivered via distance education technology shall be selected by the same procedures used to determine all instructional assignments. Instructors shall possess the minimum qualifications for the discipline into which the course's subject matter most appropriately falls, in accordance with article 2 (commencing with section 53410) of subchapter 4 of chapter 4, and with the list of discipline definitions and requirements adopted by the Board of Governors to implement that article, as such list may be amended from time to time.
- 2) Instructors of distance education shall be prepared to teach in a distance education delivery method consistent with local district policies and negotiated agreements.
- 3) The number of students assigned to any one course section offered by distance education shall be determined by and be consistent with other district procedures related to faculty assignment. Procedures for determining the number of students assigned to a course section offered in whole or in part by distance education may include a review by the curriculum committee established pursuant to section 55002(a)(1).
- 4) Nothing in this section shall be construed to impinge upon or detract from any negotiations or negotiated agreements between exclusive representatives and district governing boards.

## Summary: Things to Keep in Mind

- An online distance learning course must meet the same standards of course quality as an in-person course. *Use your in-person course as a model but recognize that you may need to plan online opportunities for interaction that would occur naturally in person.*
- Student learning objectives, measurable objectives, and lecture and lab topics must follow the Course Outline of Record.
- *Any portion* of a course conducted through distance education must include regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between the instructor(s) and students, (and among students if described in the distance education addendum), either synchronously or asynchronously.
  - A hybrid course must meet RSI in its online portion.
  - RSI is essentially instructor-initiated.
  - Plan student-to-student interaction in your course if you typically have it in person.
- An instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency. *Teaching assistants, coaches, advisors, or automated publisher packs are not the instructor and cannot be counted as RSI.*
- Enrolled students are expected to show academic engagement during the week. *Plan activities each week for students to fulfill and for faculty to demonstrate RSI. Active engagement includes attending a synchronous class or field trip; submitting an assessment; participating in a group project, discussion, study session, or interactive tutorial or instruction; and interacting with the instructor about academic matters.*
- Courses must meet accessibility guidelines. *Updating your online course for accessibility is often time-consuming. Be sure to leave yourself enough time to complete it.*

# Part 2: Policies & Governing Bodies

## Administrative Procedure (AP) 4105

AP 4105 is Mt. SAC's administrative procedure for distance education. It can be found on [Mt. SAC's Board Policies & Administrative Procedures](#) webpage. AP 4105 falls under the category of "Academic Affairs." AP 4105 informs online guidelines and procedures at Mt. SAC.

## Distance Learning Committee (DLC)

The [Distance Learning Committee](#) is an Academic Senate Committee that advises the campus on distance education. The purpose of the DLC is to discuss, review, and evaluate distance learning modes of instruction, and recommend best practices and new opportunities for distance learning and teaching that promote equitable access and student success.

Resolutions, recommendations, and revisions proposed by DLC must be approved by Curriculum and Instruction, Senate Executive Board, and full Senate before going into effect.

The DLC is responsible for reviewing and recommending Distance Learning Amendment Forms, which are a part of curriculum, for approval. DL Amendment Forms must be approved by the Educational Design Committee (EDC) before going into effect.

The DLC also oversees faculty training such as Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching (SPOT) and SPOT Recertification activities.

The DLC is co-chaired by a faculty member, the Distance Learning Faculty Coordinator, and a manager, the Dean of Library, Learning Resources and Distance Learning.

## Academic Senate

The [Academic Senate](#) oversees 10+1 college issues which include curriculum and other academic and professional matters.

Academic Senate approves, rejects, or edits DLC resolutions, recommendations, forms, and proposals. The Academic Senate President appoints the DL and Assistant DL Faculty Coordinators and members of the DLC. The Academic Senate approves the Presidential appointments.

## Article 13 of the Faculty Contract

Article 13 details Mt. SAC negotiations between the Faculty Association and District about distance education. Article 13 can be found in the [Faculty Contract](#).

The Faculty Contract defines working conditions, stipends and pay, faculty expectancies, scheduling, evaluations, faculty intellectual property, and other essential provisions of working life at Mt. SAC.

# Part 3: Procedures

## Curriculum Development Process & Timeline

The review and approval of new and existing distance learning courses shall follow Mt. SAC's curriculum approval procedures. A new distance education course may be taught in the first full semester after it has been approved and cleared to teach by the Educational Design Committee (EDC), which reviews Distance Learning Committee (DLC) recommendations. The DLC is charged with advising and guiding faculty and reviewing faculty submissions during the course development process to make certain that each new course meets Title 5 standards for online education.

Completely and correctly filling out [Mt. SAC's DL Amendment Form](#) as a Supplemental Form in WebCMS will fulfill these Title 5 requirements.

Like all curriculum decisions, department approval is needed to begin and continue offering a course in the distance learning modality. This decision must be logged in the department minutes. Departments shall review DL courses when traditional courses are modified or submitted for COR review. A DL Course Amendment Form must be submitted for scheduled 5-year review and when changes are made to the traditional COR in the following areas: course ID, course title, units and hours, and methods of delivery, and must be reflected in the minutes.

Departments may designate a course Fully Online by Mutual Agreement (FOMA) on the DL Amendment Form, in which case the course is to be offered online only in the event of an emergency that requires the campus to move online. FOMA courses cannot be offered online during regular, non-emergency situations.

The procedures for submitting DL Amendment forms are listed below. DL Amendment form approval follows the same timeline as any COR modification; in other words, DL Forms may be submitted before May for approval the following academic year. Forms are approved by committee; therefore, the DL Coordinator alone cannot approve forms.

## Creating and Submitting the Distance Learning Amendment Form

- 1) The department must vote on offering a course via distance learning and record the approval in its minutes. See appendix for meeting minutes sample.
- 2) The faculty developer should fill out the DL Amendment Supplemental Form in WebCMS following instructions on the form.
  - i. Choose **one** checkbox on page 1 to indicate modality.
  - ii. Choose **all** potential instructional content pedagogy on page 3 that may be used to deliver distance education for *all* possible iterations of the course. The form covers all possible delivery methods for all instructors over the next few years. Checking additional delivery methods does not require that all faculty use that method. Rather, it allows faculty to *choose* to use that method. *The DLC recommends checking as many checkboxes as possible to give faculty the maximum amount of flexibility. If you do not check the box, you are indicating your courses will never use that modality.*
  - iii. Note that several checkboxes are **required** on page 4.
    - a. A course orientation is required for distance learning courses.
    - b. Monitoring student engagement is required for distance learning courses.
  - iv. **All** accessibility checkboxes must be checked in the eventuality that faculty use these functions.
- 3) In WebCMS, the faculty developer should ensure that the checkbox that indicates the course will be offered distance learning is checked.
- 4) The Distance Learning Coordinator prechecks and schedules the form for DLC review.
  - i. The DLC meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays of Fall and Spring semesters.
  - ii. **The DLC does not review forms until the COR is at stage 4** of the curriculum review process.
- 5) The DLC reviews the DL Amendment form during a DLC meeting. If major changes need to be made, the Distance Learning Coordinator will contact the faculty developer and give instructions on changes to make. Otherwise the form is approved by the DLC.
- 6) The Distance Learning Coordinator forwards approvals to EDC so they can schedule the course on their agenda.
- 7) After EDC minutes are accepted by Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), Banner is updated to show DL approval and the DL Amendment Form is uploaded to a [webpage with DL Amendment forms](#).

If faculty discover mistakes or omissions in forms uploaded to the Approved DL Amendment Forms webpage, please contact the DL Faculty Coordinator so the forms can be corrected.

## Faculty Preparation for Teaching Online

Title 5 CCR Section 55208 mandates that “instructors of distance education shall be prepared to teach in a distance education delivery method consistent with local district policies and negotiated agreements.” Prior to being scheduled to teach a distance learning course, faculty must be certified to teach distance learning courses by satisfactorily completing the Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching (SPOT) process or equivalent as approved by Academic Senate and established by the College. SPOT or the equivalent certification is designed to help faculty create DL courses that

demonstrate best practices for course design and equity, and meet state and federal regulations for accessibility and regular and substantive interaction.

## List of SPOT-Trained Faculty

To determine whether a faculty member has fulfilled the Mt. SAC training requirements, check the [SPOT-Certified Faculty Webpage](#). Faculty members may not be added to the schedule to teach online courses until SPOT or the equivalent has been completed.

## Skills & Pedagogy for Online Teaching (SPOT)

SPOT (Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching) is the certification process for Mt. SAC faculty who wish to teach courses online. SPOT was developed by Mt. SAC faculty in the early 2000's and has been continually revised to reflect updated technological, regulatory, and pedagogical requirements.

SPOT is an online, self-paced, direct assessment course that teaches faculty how to use best practices in teaching distance education courses by having them create actual course modules, including a course orientation, and undergo an interactive review with a trained peer. Faculty may then use some or all of their modules when they are scheduled to teach a course.

Faculty sign up for SPOT by accessing the [SPOT Registration webpage](#) and find the link under "To Register for SPOT." Faculty must have and use a Mt. SAC email account. SPOT training is conducted entirely within the LMS (Canvas), but SPOT assumes faculty already know how to use the LMS.

To complete the SPOT course, faculty will create an orientation module and four content modules of an online course, using the best practices for online teaching presented in the SPOT course. A SPOT reviewer will assess the course using a rubric that is based on the CVC Course Design Rubric. Course changes may be required in order to bring the course into compliance with the rubric and therefore earn SPOT certification. After earning SPOT certification, faculty will be added to the [SPOT Certified Faculty List](#).

Faculty often ask how long it takes to complete SPOT. SPOT is designed to take 40 hours. However, the time you need depends on many factors, including:

- number of faculty who have already submitted courses in the review queue,
- condition of the course and rubric,
- Canvas skills, since SPOT does not teach faculty how to use Canvas,
- basic technology skills,
- faculty responsiveness to revision requests,
- accessibility challenges,
- lack of content delivery,
- faculty over-relying on publisher materials, and
- possible discipline-specific challenges.

**The Distance Learning Coordinators recommend faculty members start SPOT at least two semesters before they want to teach online.**



Upon completion, faculty can earn either 40 hours of Professional Growth Increment (PGI) or a stipend depending on their position. Contact Faculty Association for more information.

### SPOT Equivalency (SPEQ)

Faculty can earn SPOT Equivalency if they have received online training at approved Community Colleges by meeting both of the following requirements:

- 1) The faculty member received online training from a training program approved by the Distance Learning Committee, **and**
- 2) The faculty member submits a course shell for an expedited review by a Mt. SAC SPOT reviewer, who verifies that key criteria for distance learning at Mt. SAC are met.
- 3) Key criteria includes: an orientation with student and tech resources; course is in modules; course is accessible; course includes enough RSI.

Before registering for SPEQ, faculty should check the [SPEQ Equivalency webpage](#) to see if the training they received at another college has been approved. Faculty should submit a course shell that demonstrates course orientation, regular and substantive interaction, accessibility, and good course design.

The Distance Learning Committee determines whether or not a college's training program meets the requirements for SPOT Equivalency. For more information, contact the Assistant Distance Learning Coordinator.

## Approved External Trainings: Accepted @ONE Trainings

Faculty can meet Mt. SAC's SPOT requirement by completing/earning any one of the following @ONE trainings *that must be taken through @ONE*. To receive credit, upload the @ONE badge or certificate at the link provided on the SPOT registration webpage. It's preferred but not required that faculty use their Mt. SAC email address when signing up for the @ONE course.

Check @ONE to [register for courses](#). Completion of any of the following will be counted as SPOT certification.

- @ONE's Introduction to Asynchronous Online Teaching and Learning course (formerly known as Introduction to Online Teaching and Learning)
- @ONE's Online Teaching and Design certification
- CVC-OEI quality-reviewed badge ([POCR certification](#))

## SPOT Recertification

After achieving SPOT certification (or the equivalent), faculty must be recertified every four years to continue to teach online. To achieve recertification, SPOT-certified faculty must complete four hours of DLC-approved online-focused training.

Faculty can check their individual certification date on the [SPOT Certified Faculty list](#). The four hours need to be completed within the four years before the recertification date. Training above the four hours cannot be carried forward. Training requirements reset every four years.

The Distance Learning Committee approves recertification training. Currently, four hours are required.

- One hour must be Regulations Update for SPOT Recertification, a self-paced online or synchronous online course.
- One hour must be RSI Review with a faculty mentor. See procedures under RSI.
- The other two hours are faculty choice of DLC-approved trainings. The SPOT Recertification webpage lists approved trainings.

After completing certification, upload evidence per instructions on the [SPOT recertification webpage](#).

Evidence of approved training completion can be found in your POD transcript. To find this transcript, follow these steps.

Access POD and sign in with your credentials.

- 1) Find the My Transcript tab or icon and go to your Transcript.
- 2) Click to change the listing from Active to Completed (it's at the upper left of the Transcript).
- 3) On the Completed list, download certificates that demonstrate session completion.
- 4) Contact POD at [pod@mtsac.edu](mailto:pod@mtsac.edu) you have questions or concerns about your transcript.

If faculty took approved @ONE sessions, they should have received a badge. In that case, the badge can be presented as evidence.

## Canvas Skills Needed to Complete SPOT

SPOT does not teach faculty how to use Canvas. It is recommended that faculty know how to do the following tasks before signing up for SPOT.

- Upload content, documents, and images
- Create, design, and edit Canvas pages
- Create, design, and edit course modules
- Create announcements and discussion forums
- Create assessments, quizzes, and surveys
- Grade within the system (using SpeedGrader)
- Create and use grading rubrics
- Upload accessible multimedia

## Resources to Help Faculty Complete SPOT

The Faculty Center for Learning Technology (FCLT) provides a list of [resources to help learn Canvas](#). The FCLT maintains the Canvas Faculty Center and a Faculty Accessibility Center, both Canvas courses in which faculty can self-enroll. After self-enrollment, the course will appear in the faculty dashboard.

The DLC recommends taking the self-paced course Growing with Canvas. To self-enroll, visit the FCLT's [Teaching with Technology webpage's](#) Learn Canvas section.

The [FCLT](#) also offers sessions on Canvas tools. Check the FCLT blog, News Bytes, or the POD Calendar. Canvas provides instructional guides and video resources. This can be found by clicking the Help icon in the Canvas global navigation menu.

# Procedures for Scheduling & Starting to Teach an Online Course

## Items for the Course Schedule

Distance Learning Courses shall be listed in the Mt. SAC Schedule of Classes in the same manner as in-person courses. If a section is offered in a distance education format, the Schedule of Classes must include the following information:

- 1) All online and in-person synchronous meeting days/dates and times.
- 2) Any required asynchronous in-person activities.
- 3) Any required technology platforms, devices, and applications.
- 4) Any test or assessment proctoring requirements.
- 5) Whether the section is low cost or zero cost textbook.

## Merging Course Shells to Maintain FERPA Compliance

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides guidelines for access to and release of student education records. Any student at a post-secondary institution, even those who are not yet 18 years of age, has the right to: check their student records, request amendments/corrections to their records, opt out of disclosing directory information and use an alias in the case of distance education. A “student” is defined as an individual who is or has been “in attendance” at an educational agency or institution and regarding whom the agency or institution maintains education records. The final regulations add other situations in which students “attend” classes but are not physically present, including attendance by videoconference, satellite, Internet, or other electronic information and telecommunications technologies. Under FERPA, a school may not generally disclose personally identifiable information from an eligible student's education records to a third party unless the eligible student has provided written consent. Third parties include other students who are not enrolled in the same class section.

Faculty who want to merge multiple sections of the same asynchronous (fully) online class for which they are the instructors of record (i.e., multiple ENG-1A sections taught by the same professor) must complete FERPA training. Faculty will need to complete the 3-steps outlined below to merge their Canvas shells. This is a one-time training. Please note that if there are significant changes to FERPA regulations faculty may be required to complete an [updated training](#).

Asynchronous courses of the same course identifier but different CRNs may be merged.

In merging Canvas shells of the same course and modality, faculty must follow guidelines to ensure that students of one CRN section cannot interact with or see the enrollment of students of another CRN section.

To initiate merging two Canvas shells, contact the IT department two weeks before the start of the semester or according to the deadline provided by your division. Shells will not be merged after the semester begins.

## Canvas Settings to Ensure FERPA Compliance

Under Settings, set the following conditions:

- Using the Navigation tab, hide the People link from students in the course navigation menu.
- Using the Navigation tab, hide the Chat and Conferences/BigBlueButton links since faculty cannot separate chats by section. [See Canvas guide for details on changing Navigation.](#)
- Under the Course Details tab, scroll down and click more options. Make sure that:
  - “Let students create discussion topics” is not checked
  - “Let students organize their own groups” is not checked
  - “Disable comments on announcements” is checked
  - “Hide grade distribution graphs from students” is checked

When creating **Groups**, select the option to **Require group members to be in the same section** when creating a group set. [See Canvas guide for details on creating groups.](#)

When creating **Discussions**, choose one of the following conditions:

- Create more than one discussion and assign a separate discussion to each CRN section. For an ungraded discussion, follow the same process but use the “post to” option.  
**OR**
- Create groups based on CRN sections and assign the discussion to the CRN-based groups.
  - Choose “This is a group discussion” to create groups by CRN. [See Canvas guide for details on discussions.](#) If faculty create smaller groups, they can still keep students in the same section and verify that they have set up the groups properly.
  - If a group discussion is copied to a new course shell, such as for a new semester, faculty must edit each group discussion in the new shell to assign students into the correct sections. Faculty need to create groups separated by CRN in the People tab of the new course shell, then each discussion must be edited to be a group discussion using those defined groups. If this is not done in the new course shell, all students will be able to see all other students' responses.
  - When a student joins a class after groups are made, faculty must manually add the new students to a group that is appropriate for the CRN in which they are enrolled.

When creating **Peer Review** assignments, faculty must manually assign students from the same CRN to review each other.

When creating **Canvas Collaborations**, faculty must manually create the Collaboration groups to ensure that students are from the same section. The Collaboration screen does not display section information, so faculty will need to use the People tab or the Gradebook for that information. (For collaborative tasks/activities using third party tools, please refer to the **Consideration for Third Party Apps** section below.)

When sending an **Inbox message** to multiple students, select the option to **Send an individual message to each recipient**. This will send a separate copy to each recipient and hide the names of the recipients in the message header.

When using **Canvas Studio**, disable comments, or post a separate video for each section if using the comments feature for the video.

To complete Mt. SAC FERPA training, visit the [FERPA Training for Faculty webpage](#).

## Ascertaining No Shows

- Asynchronous online courses should be set to start the first day of the term at 7:30 a.m.
- Synchronous online courses and hybrid online courses should start the first day printed in the Schedule of Classes.

Faculty will drop, as a No-Show, any student who has not actively participated in the course or has not completed the faculty-determined check-in activity. Faculty members have discretion to establish any date between the official start of the term and the third day of the term as the No Show deadline. The No-Show date and check-in activity must be explicitly defined by each faculty member in the syllabus and within the LMS, preferably as part of an orientation module and/or pre-semester announcement. Examples of participation and check-in activities for asynchronous courses include posting in discussion forums, completing a syllabus quiz, updating a profile, or any other meaningful activity that requires the students to engage. E-mailing the instructor at a personal e-mail address or counting logins as ‘attendance’ do not fall within these guidelines.

Synchronous courses can use appearance in a synchronous meeting as the criteria for a No Show.

Federal and WASC guidelines to prevent financial aid fraud mean that initial student logins to distance education courses do not count as student participation. According to the Department of Education: “...institutions [need] to take steps necessary to ensure that students are academically engaged prior to disbursing Title IV student aid funds.” If students do not begin attendance, Title IV funds must be returned (34 CFR 668.21(a)) (Runcie & Ocha).

## Monitoring Attendance and Participation

Mt. SAC online courses will follow the same guidelines for attendance and participation as in -person classes, with a few exceptions. Students will register and enroll in distance learning courses in the same manner as in-person courses, but attendance will be determined through professor-determined contact in the first week of the term.

Each online or hybrid course syllabus and orientation module should have a well-defined and detailed description of participation course policies that support the College’s attendance policy. Participation must be considered as “active engagement.” Regulations for “active engagement” are as follows.

Active engagement is defined as:

- 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;
- Submitting an academic assignment;
- Taking an assessment or an exam;
- Participating in an interactive tutorial or webinar, or other interactive computer-assisted instruction;

- Participating in a study group, group project, or an online discussion that is assigned by the institution; or
- Interacting with an instructor about academic matters; and

Active engagement is not:

- Living in institutional housing;
- Participating in the institution's meal plan;
- Logging into an online class or tutorial without any further participation; or
- Participating in academic counseling or advisement.

According to the Faculty Contract (13.A.7), DL faculty are responsible for dropping students if they do not participate regularly in activities defined in the syllabus as 20% or more of any part of the scheduled class term prior to the established drop date for the class. Twenty percent (20%) (i.e. in class and replaced seat time) represents 3.2 weeks in a 16-week course, 1.6 weeks in an 8-week course, and 1.2 weeks in a 6-week course.

The syllabus and orientation should explicitly state the activities that count toward drop and how the professor will calculate the 20% missed. Activities must demonstrate active engagement (see definition, above) and therefore a student who merely logs in to the LMS does not count as attending the course.

The “Last Day of Attendance” counted in the online classroom is the last day of class participation (active engagement) by the student.

Legal Reference: Education Code Sections 70901 and 84500. Title 5 Section 58004 (c) (1) – (3), 55204, and Involuntary Drop after Census Date CCCCCO Legal Opinion 11-04

## Adding Students from the Wait List

Faculty should follow the same procedures for adding students from the waitlist as they do on in-person courses. Contact students and send add codes to students who have signed up for the waitlist first, then address students who might email you the first week of class.

Remember that waitlisted students do not receive announcements! You will need to reach out to students on the wait list through your portal or via email.

Faculty must not add students to Canvas course shells. Students must add online courses the same way they do a face-to-face class.

Do not add wait-listed students in other roles not assigned by registration through Banner if you wish the student to get credit for the course. If you have a student who is acting as a TA, you may add the student as a TA, but the student should not be enrolled for credit in the course.

## Procedures for Doing Evaluations of an Online Course

Faculty are evaluated regularly, as specified in the Faculty Association (FA) Contract. When evaluations are done in a DL course, there are specific evaluation forms to be used. These forms are different than those used in traditional courses. The two forms to be used for DL faculty evaluations are titled:

- H.4.c - Classroom Visitation Evaluation of Distance Learning Faculty
- H.2.e - Student Evaluations of Distance Learning Faculty

Section 13.C of the Faculty Contract details peer classroom visitation procedures. Adjunct faculty who teach distance learning courses and do not have rehire rights must have a DL course as part of their evaluation.

The peer evaluator should have experience in distance learning, shall request permission to enter the faculty's course at an agreed-upon time, and shall not have contact with students in the course. Since the peer evaluator will be assessing Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI), the faculty member should add the peer evaluator as a Course Reviewer. As a fellow faculty member, the peer evaluator is allowed to view student assessments to evaluate faculty feedback.

The peer evaluator fills out the H.4.C and contacts the faculty to have a dialogue. The faculty member should be given the opportunity to discuss or show the peer evaluator parts of the course that may impact the evaluation. Although they might contain constructive criticism, peer evaluations are meant to improve faculty performance and a friendly and collegial interchange is optimal. After the form is complete, both the professor and the observer sign the form and forward it to the department chair.

Faculty should deploy student evaluations by accessing the Faculty Self Service section of the Portal and selecting "Activate a Student Evaluation of Your Class." Adjunct faculty should include the email of the department chair or other faculty who is completing the H.8 summary evaluation. It is recommended that faculty give students one to two weeks to complete the student evaluation, announce it often, and possibly offer extra credit to encourage completion. Faculty can request a list of participants (disaggregated from their individual responses) to award extra credit.

The department chair or designated faculty is responsible for summarizing the results of the peer evaluation (H.4.C) and student evaluation (H.2.E). The summary form is signed by a division dean and the department chair, then forwarded to the adjunct faculty member for signature.

Since adjunct DL faculty often do not come to campus, it is important that adjunct DL faculty check Mt. SAC email regularly to respond to requests for evaluations and to sign and return forms. Faculty who are unresponsive or unreachable will earn negative scores in the sections, "This professor adheres to faculty evaluation procedures and timelines," and "This professor is reasonably accessible and responsive to departments and divisions."



## Protocol for Distance Education Review During Accreditation

Distance learning courses will be reviewed by members of the accreditation review team as part of the accreditation process. The protocol described below is taken from the ACCJC Accreditation Handbook. Most recently, the review team was given administrative access that allowed them to see anything within the Canvas course shell.

The Commission's Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education (in compliance with federal regulation 34 CFR § 602.3) specifies that all learning opportunities provided by accredited institutions must have equivalent quality, accountability, and focus on student outcomes, regardless of mode of delivery. ACCJC's protocol for review of distance education below aligns with this policy and helps to verify ongoing commitment to academic quality and continuous improvement in an online modality using consistent procedures for each review.

### Guidelines for Institutions: Preparing for Review

In preparation for distance education review, Mt SAC will prepare a random sample of distance education courses for review by the ACCJC accreditation peer team. The following criteria is used to prepare the sample:

- Courses in the sample should be 100% online (i.e., exclude hybrid sections). Indicate whether the individual sections in the sample were offered synchronously or asynchronously.
- All sections in the sample should be from the semester, quarter, or term immediately preceding the date of the review. For example: if the review is in fall 2026, the sample courses must be from spring 2026.
- The sample should include 5% of the total number of distance education sections offered in the sample semester but should contain a minimum of 15 sections and a maximum of 50 sections.

Once the sample has been prepared, Mt SAC's team chair provides the accreditation peer review team with access to the sample. The accreditation peer review team will review each section in the sample for evidence of regular and substantive interaction, as defined in the Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education. Therefore, **the reviewers should have a level of access to the LMS that allows them to observe activities where this interaction takes place.**

According to ACCJC guidelines, Institutions generally inform faculty members when any of their sections have been included in the review sample. Because the team members are focused on archived courses from a previous semester, they will not be interfering with instruction or course design, and they are not evaluating individual instructors. Institutions should expect peer review team members to maintain confidentiality of student and instructor information in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process at all times.

For more information about Mt SAC's accreditation, visit the [Mt. SAC Accreditation webpage](#).

# Part 4: Required Course Elements

Faculty are **required** to include the following course elements in online courses at Mt. SAC, per AP 4105, the Distance Learning Amendment Form, regulations, or other shared governance decisions.

## Using Canvas as the LMS

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 course is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. Accepted practices for authentication include user ID and password authentication to access the student portal or Learning Management System (LMS). All online courses will be conducted through the Mt. SAC LMS. Publisher materials may also be used as long as the publisher materials are accessed through the Mt. SAC LMS and meet federal and state guidelines for accessibility and regular and substantive interaction.

## Syllabus & Orientation

Faculty may use the Canvas Syllabus link to build an online syllabus; attach an accessible syllabus for students to download; or both.

Course Orientations are required in online courses, per the DL Amendment Form. The Course Orientation should include, at minimum, an introduction to the course; course navigation; student services and technology resources; a communication plan that details faculty contact information, office hours, and response times; and the No Show assignment.

## Student Services & Technological Resources

Suggested wording for a Technological Resources page is in the appendix.

It's recommended that the orientation and/or syllabus of the course include student services available to students online.

## Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

Establishing and maintaining regular and substantive interaction is arguably the most important aspect of delivering an online or hybrid course. It is not only a federal and Title 5 requirement but is also a practice that encourages and facilitates student-centered instruction and improves student learning outcomes.

### The Instructor of Record is Responsible for RSI

The **instructor of record** is the individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency. Instructors of record are responsible for meeting regular and substantive interaction (RSI) guidelines. RSI cannot be achieved by tutors, counselors, student assistants, or automated publisher materials.

To meet this requirement, instructors should use varied types of interactions that are employed in a regular, predictable, and scheduled manner. As most credit courses are organized by week, faculty should schedule multiple RSI opportunities each week to monitor student engagement. Erratic or widely spaced RSI activities are not considered regular or predictable. Self-paced courses are not considered scheduled. Faculty should not open an entire class for students to work on at will as it may impinge on RSI.

### Methods of RSI

Because instructional time in an asynchronous, time-based (not competency based) course is calculated by week, faculty should “make available the instructional materials, other resources, and instructor support necessary for academic engagement and completion of course objectives; and should...expect enrolled student[s] to perform educational activities demonstrating academic engagement during the week.” It is therefore required that faculty set the timing and pacing of the course and demonstrate interaction on a predictable and scheduled basis according to weekly setup. To follow RSI regulations, the faculty should schedule the course activities, not enable students to do their own scheduling.

Per regulations, 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 on a predictable and scheduled basis:

- 1) Providing direct instruction, through online synchronous meetings or other video conferences. The Department of Education has specified that direct instruction can be achieved through synchronous modalities only. Therefore, this method cannot be counted for asynchronous elements such as recorded videos.
- 2) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework by using embedded rubrics, individualized comments, or videos. Entering a grade does not count as feedback. Note that rote feedback (e.g., “good job!”) is not considered individualized or substantive. This is an easy type of RSI for evaluators to see and gives students valuable information on their progress.
- 3) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency, including course communication using LMS tools, email, phone, external apps, or in-person meetings. The communication page/plan in your Orientation should describe which methods you use. Multiple methods of outreach are preferred.

- 4) Facilitating a group discussion. To be considered discussion facilitation, faculty should consider the following criteria:
  - i. A discussion should include two or more students.
  - ii. Faculty facilitation should take place before the discussion is closed. After the discussion closes, additional interaction would be considered feedback.
  - iii. Faculty who facilitate a discussion prompt should post substantive comments that students can use to help them understand the topic better, contextualize comments, provide resources, and keep students on track within the discussion itself.
    - a. It is not considered necessary to post a reply to every student in a discussion; however, faculty may want to make sure they are not responding to the same students over a series of weeks.
    - b. The number of substantive comments the faculty delivers may vary depending on the discussion topic.
  - iv. Faculty may use tools to facilitate discussions, including but not limited to Canvas discussions, Perusall, GoReact, VoiceThread, or other discipline-specific communication tool. Whatever tool is used, faculty should post substantive comments for other students' benefit.
  - v. Faculty facilitation may also include student interaction and direction after the release of the prompt, i.e., putting students into collaborative groups; assigning and following up with peer reviews; visiting breakout rooms in synchronous classes to check in and answer questions; contacting students regarding difficult topics.
    - a. Although faculty may reach out to students in the Comments section of SpeedGrader, faculty should recognize that peer evaluators will probably see this as feedback, not facilitation. Other ways of reaching out include messaging through Gradebook and Inbox.
    - b. Faculty should describe these collaborative processes thoroughly in the instructions.
- 5) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency. Unless your program's accrediting agency has provided you with requirements, this item is probably not going to be used by most faculty at Mt. SAC.

Per 34 CFR 600.2, all faculty must **monitor** students' academic engagement and success and **promptly and proactively engage** in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student. Faculty are urged to set up a semester schedule to monitor student work on a consistent basis. Most faculty check their Gradebook at least once a week and use the "Message Students Who" function to contact students who are not submitting assignments, and periodically email students who are falling behind using email, Inbox, Pronto, and the Early Alert system.

Faculty should indicate to their students that they will be doing this activity, typically in the recommended Communication section. Below are some sample syllabus or orientation statements. Faculty should feel free to craft their own statements that reflect their point of view.

- In [your course], student success is a priority, so I am concerned about students' progress in this course. For this reason, I will be monitoring grades and student progress and will reach out to students who may be struggling with issues such as class participation or assignments. These "check-ins" will occur via Mt SAC email or Canvas messaging. I also send notification through Mt

SAC's Early Alert System to put you in touch with appropriate campus resources. These check-ins are designed to maximize your chances for success in the course, so please respond to any communications you receive from me, your Academic Counselor, or other campus offices. These check-ins will occur every 2-3 weeks.

- I use your completion of assignments and discussions to monitor your progress in the course weekly, and you can contact me using Canvas Inbox regarding your progress and grades. I will reach out to you if I feel you are falling behind.
- I know life gets complex and it's easy to get distracted. I will be reaching out to you via Announcements every week, and I will check your progress regularly and let you know if you missed an important deadline. Set your notifications to get my announcements and check your Mt. SAC email to see if I have emailed you. Let's work together so you succeed!

## Student-to-Student Contact

Student-to-student contact should be included if the equivalent in-person course includes student-to-student contact. This is reflected in the DL Amendment form. Student-to-student contact should include at least **one** of the following methods:

- Discussion forums with required replies
- Collaborations, peer reviews, or other group assignments done online
- Breakout rooms in synchronous online classes
- Student – student communication relating to the course
- Other opportunities for student-initiated communication with peers

## Showing RSI Evidence Out of Canvas

If an instructor uses a contact method not name the method and describe in detail where to find it and how it will be used in the course (e.g., syllabus, orientation, announcements, etc.) to indicate to the student and a potential evaluator that it is available.

## RSI Self-Assessment & Review: The RSI Rubric

A workgroup composed of faculty and managers, in consultation with the DLC, Academic Senate, and Faculty Association, finalized a rubric which will be used to determine if a professor demonstrates RSI in a live course. The RSI rubric can be found at <https://www.mtsac.edu/distancelearning/rsi.html>.

- The rubric will be used as part of the SPOT recertification process (under negotiation).
- The rubric includes choices that are directly related to DL regulations. The professor is deemed to “demonstrate RSI” or “not demonstrate RSI” in the course.
- Faculty begin by evaluating a live course, in process at least 25% of the semester. They fill out the rubric by identifying RSI elements visible in Canvas or evidence of RSI delivered through external tools in their course.
- A reviewer then checks the course using the rubric. The reviewer should verify evidence and validate that regular monitoring and at least two forms of RSI are being demonstrated on a regular, predictable, and scheduled basis.
- A follow-up written communication should be sent to the professor, department chair, and administrator within two weeks of the completed review.
- If the course is not found to demonstrate RSI, the faculty member may request a new reviewer or may work with the current reviewer to update the course to demonstrate RSI (under negotiation).
- If the second review does not find adequate regular and substantive interaction, a professor may be required to repeat SPOT certification or its equivalent to maintain eligibility for teaching DL courses.

## Resources for RSI

- Individual RSI Appointments with Instructional Designers – make an appointment
- The Canvas Faculty Center includes a variety of apps and tools that can foster RSI.
- RSI Roundup: News Bytes Blog

- [DLC Recommendation for RSI \(Regular and Substantive Interaction\) Rubric and Process](#) [File Download] – September 2022
- Canvas Merging Shells and Related Matters Recommendation for RSI Rubric
- Enroll in [RSI Samples Canvas course](#)
- [Empire State University’s RSI page](#) which includes several mix and match course design and delivery strategies

## Accessible Course Materials

5 CCR section 55200 states that “**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... [Courses] 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 Distance Learning Amendment Form includes a list of functions which must be accessible in every course. This includes both Canvas pages and any related documents, such as Word documents, PowerPoint slides, PDFs, spreadsheets, or images.

### Text

- **Color Contrast** – There is sufficient color contrast between the foreground text and background. [More Information on Color Contrast](#).
- **Color and Meaning** – Color is not used as the only means of conveying information, adding emphasis, indicating action, or otherwise distinguishing a visual element. [More Information on Color and Meaning](#).
- **Heading Styles** – Styles are consistently used for headings. Heading levels (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) are in sequential descending order. Don’t skip levels. [More Information on Headings](#).
- **Links** – Links are identified with meaningful and unique text in place of displaying the URL. [More Information on Links](#).
- **Lists** – Lists are created using the bullet or numbered list tool instead of being formatted manually. [More Information on Lists](#).
- **PDFs** – Any PDF files will be text-based, not scanned, and use true headings (e.g. created with the styles menu in MS Word). [More Information on PDFs](#).
- **Reading Order** – Reading order is correctly set so that content is presented in the proper sequence. [More Information on Reading Order](#).
- **Slides** – Slides are created using built-in accessible slide layouts with each slide having a unique title. [More Information on Slides](#).
- **Spreadsheets** – Spreadsheets include labels for the rows and columns, detailed labels for charts, and are accompanied by textual descriptions that draw attention to key cells, trends, and totals. [More Information on Spreadsheets](#).
- **Tables** – Column and/or row header cells are designated. Don’t merge rows. Repeat table headings across pages. A table caption is included for more complex tables. [More Information on Tables](#).

### *Images*

**Images** – All images have appropriate alternative text, either explaining instructional value or indicating the image is decorative. [More Information on Images](#).

**Flashing Content** – Blinking or flashing content, including gifs, should only be used if instructionally needed and not merely for decoration or emphasis. Flashing content must not flash more than three times in any one second period or exceed the general and red flash thresholds. [More Information on Flashing Content](#).

### *Video & Audio*

**Video** – All video must have accurate captions. Auto-captioning is not accurate enough for instructional purposes. If this is the case, the professor may need to correct captions. If a video has no audio or instructionally relevant soundtrack, a note explaining that should accompany the video. [More Information on Video](#).

**Auto-play** – Audio and video content should not be set to auto-play. [More Information on Auto-Play](#).

**Live Captions** – Live broadcast and synchronous video conferences must include a means for displaying synchronized captions if requested. [More Information on Live Captions](#).

**Audio** – Audio files must be accompanied by complete and accurate transcripts. [More Information on Audio](#).

### *Publisher Content*

**Accessibility** – If any component of the course is conducted via a publisher application in Canvas or a website outside of Canvas, the component must meet [Section 508 requirements](#).

Note that publisher materials frequently do not meet Mt. SAC accessibility requirements. Faculty should check the publisher materials they use carefully as faculty are held responsible for ensuring the accessibility of their courses. In particular, make sure that videos are accurately captioned, with proper capitalization, punctuation, synchronization, and spelling; and check that PowerPoints have informative alt texts. Some publishers include alt texts that refer to the position of the image in the text, but do not describe the image adequately for a student who is blind.

### *How Do I Check Accessibility in My Course?*

Faculty are responsible for checking the accessibility of their courses. The DLC recommends doing an accessibility check every semester before publishing the course.

Built-in ways in Canvas to check for accessibility:

- Conduct the Canvas UDOIT Accessibility Checker. Visit the [Canvas Faculty Accessibility Center](#) for more information
- Conduct the “Validate Links in Content” under Canvas Settings. Visit [How do I validate links in a course?](#) for more information



- Run a TidyUp in Canvas to check for unused files. Visit the [Canvas Faculty Accessibility Center](#) for more information
- Use the Accessibility Guide (PopeTech) button (while in Edit) for content pages. Visit the [Canvas Faculty Accessibility Center](#) for more information

Manual ways to check for accessibility:

- Check videos for accurate (99%) captioning; including capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and synchronization. Make sure videos are not auto-generated captions
- Check images for proper alt-text
- Be sure to links are described appropriately (no “click here”)
- Restrict the use of all-capital words to acronyms and initialisms
- Review content pages for proper heading structure; accessibility checkers (like those listed above) will only check “skipped” headings, not correct hierarchical structure
- Visit the [Canvas Faculty Accessibility Center](#) for more information

### *Resources to Help Faculty Achieve Accessible Courses*

Free services are provided at Mt. SAC and through the CCC system to support accessibility work, list document remediation and captioning, and the CCC Accessibility Center.

- Canvas itself includes options you can use in your own course, including Validating Links, UDolt, a page accessibility checker (“little person” at the bottom of the Edit box), and PopeTech. In addition, Canvas Studio incorporates captioning (you must check the captioning for spelling and punctuation).
- [Faculty Accessibility Center Canvas Course](#) – gives more information on accessibility in Canvas
- [Accessibility at Mt. SAC](#) webpage
- [Captioning Services at Mt. SAC](#)

# Part 5: Best Practices

The best online courses are easy to navigate, intuitive, attractive, and engaging. The following list of best practices are highly recommended in Mt. SAC online courses.

## Pre-Semester Communication/Open Day Welcome

A welcome “letter” (email or announcement) is intended to support students in accessing the course and participating in the first week. The letter ideally contains important preliminary information about the instructor, Canvas, the course, and initial activities. It's not meant to serve the function of a syllabus, though. You want it to be welcoming, not overwhelming!

Pre-semester communications can be sent as a course announcement or as an email through the faculty portal in Banner. Students only get course announcements when (1) the course is published and (2) the student has not changed the default notification settings (by default, the student receives announcements). If the course is published to send the announcement, faculty may want to unpublish modules until the opening day of the semester.

The letter should be archived in the course in an easy-to-locate spot (most likely your Orientation module). While the information will be redundant to most students, it may be critical to late adds and other students who, for whatever reason, didn't receive the pre-course email.

Remember that waitlisted students do not receive announcements! You will need to reach out to students on the wait list through the portal or email.

## Create a Communication Plan in Your Syllabus & Orientation

Inform your students how you will communicate with them so they know what to expect during the semester and so you can establish a schedule for RSI.

- Create a “Communicating with Me” page in your Orientation. This section should include:
  - Email, phone, office location, and office hours. Although it is doubtful an online student will come to campus to meet you, it is part of your official setup.
  - A suggestion on how to set student Notifications to receive your communications.
  - A description of external apps you will use (if any) and access methods, such as QR codes.
  - A description of how often you will reach out to students via announcements.
  - A description of how long it will take you to respond to student inquiries.
  - A description of how you will be monitoring student success.
  - A description of how you facilitate discussions.
  - A description of how long it will take you to give feedback on assignments and other assessments.
- Opening week and mid-week announcements. It is recommended that you reach out to students regularly to remind them of deadlines and pique their interest in the topic of the week.

If you include some instructional content in these announcements, they may be considered RSI, although RSI usually relies upon interaction.

## Home or Landing Page

A Home or Landing page is recommended by the CVC to orient students, especially at the start of a semester. Home pages welcome students to your course and show them where to start. Home pages include information helpful to students to conceptualize how they will interact in the course. Some professors choose to discontinue use of the Home page after a few weeks into the semester, switching the course to Modules view. However, it is recommended to build and start the course with a Home page.

Home pages provide a clear starting point for students. They should answer the following questions:

- How will students know where to begin?
- How will students know the order in which to move through content?
- How will students know how to find help?
- How can they best contact you for help? Include your contact information.
- Although students should know whether the course is synchronous or asynchronous based on the schedule of classes, it is often a good idea to reiterate class meeting times or the fact there are no class meetings on the Home page.

Consider including a brief “tour” of your course, either through a video or screenshot, to clarify how students will move through the course.

To create a Home page in Canvas, you will have to designate a Page as a Front page and then choose it as the Home page. Check the Canvas Instructional Guides for more information.

## Modules in Course Design

Creating Modules allows unit-level “chunking” that organizes material to help students track the instructional content and assignments that are due. Modules also serve as a road map for the instructor to achieve enough regular and substantive interaction (RSI).

Modules typically contain the following elements.

- Introduction to the section
- Learning objectives
- Instructional content, including textbook links and note-taking hints or assignments
- Additional instructional content such as videos or special readings
- Practice or comprehension assignments, such as quizzes or surveys
- Discussions and interactions about course material
- Assignments, such as essays, short answer, or homework
- Quizzes or exams
- An “end of module” page that lets students know the module has been completed.

Grouping all discussions together, all assignments together, all quizzes together is not considered student friendly. Show students what instructional content should be used in assessments. Don't make them guess where they must go next to complete the course.

In addition, disable links that they will not need for the class. For example, Pages, Files, Assignments, and Quizzes should be accessed through the Module, so students do not need to click there separately. If you are merging shells, you will definitely need to hide the People link, but even for a standalone course you should consider whether students need access to this link.

## Learning Objectives

Students benefit from a set of clearly written objectives that they will be expected to achieve within each unit or module. Clear and measurable unit-level objectives are also critical in helping an instructor identify content and assessments necessary to meet the learning goals.

Learning objectives are valuable in that they direct and guide both teaching and learning. Course-level objectives (or SLOs) identify more overarching student understanding and higher-level thinking skills, while unit-level objectives are phrased to highlight specific, discrete skills. Bloom's Taxonomy is a great resource for you to write learning objectives.

For example:

- Course-level objective: *Students will demonstrate a mastery of rules of punctuation.*
- Unit-level objective: *Students will write sentences that demonstrate correct use of commas, semicolons, and periods.*

Sometimes unit **tasks** are confused with learning **objectives**. A task is an activity to be performed (watch a video, read the textbook, write an essay). The learning objective is how students will **demonstrate** their learning (e.g., explain, summarize, analyze, predict, design). Unit content and activities should be directly related to the unit learning objectives so that student attention is focused on *what faculty really want them to learn and do within each module/unit*. This process helps faculty remove busy work and extraneous material that overwhelm, bore or dissuade students from continuing in the course.

Students should not have to exert effort to find these objectives. While there is no single "correct" location, unit-level objectives are most useful when found at the beginning of a module or unit.

## Universal Design for Learning

Students learn in different ways. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensures that materials are accessible (see Accessibility below for a complete list). UDL also provides a variety of content and assessment modalities and allows students to choose the modality that they are most comfortable with and that allows them to play to their strengths. Examples include:

- Providing accessible instructional content as videos and/or slides and/or readings and/or explain that students can have ReadSpeak read the content page aloud.
- Offering students the choice to write an essay, craft a podcast, or make a video for an assignment.

The Library provides essential information about UDL at this link.

- [UDL Guide](#)

## Equity Practices in Online Education

Colleges often struggle to institutionalize practices that support inclusion and equity in online environments. The Peralta Community College district created an Online Equity Rubric to support online course equity. It has eight sections.

- 1) **Technology Resources** – providing students with technology resources
- 2) **Student Resources and Support** – providing students with student resources and support
- 3) **Universal Design for Learning** – providing students with choices in content and assessment provision
- 4) **Diversity and Inclusion** – make faculty commitment to diversity and inclusion explicit in the syllabus and coursework
- 5) **Images and Representation** – include diverse images and stories in course examples
- 6) **Human Bias** – identify and address bias in coursework
- 7) **Content Meaning** – relate instructional content to students in a meaningful way
- 8) **Connection and Belonging** – create a sense of belonging and community in a course

## Resources for Online Instructors

- [Peralta Equity Rubric](#) - all the equity topics in one place – download the version 3.0 (2020)
- [The Norton Guide to Equity Minded Teaching](#) – free digital download
- [Creating a Syllabus based on the Principles of Universal Design for Learning and Equity](#) (Emily Versace, Mt. SAC, 2019)
- [USC's Tools for Inclusive Teaching](#) (2021): numerous references, no handouts
- [Hybrid Learning and Space Reimagination: Optimizing Access and Equity to Promote Student Success](#) (empirical research article)
- [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Online Courses](#) (Illinois State University): includes downloads
- [Inclusive Teaching Toolkits](#) (University of Illinois, Chicago) - multiple downloads
- [National Standards for Quality Online Teaching](#) (See Standard F, Diverse Instruction)
- [Equity in an Online Classroom](#) (2020) article with toolkits and downloads

## Using a Real Time Messaging App

- A real-time messaging app enabling students to communicate with each other and the instructor helps get messages to student phones, creates community, and replicates the in-person class experience without the instructor providing his or her own cell phone. Pronto is a real-time communication (chat) tool created for the everyday user that encourages engagement and interaction with students. It supports features such as real-time translation, file sharing, and live video chat. Pronto can be used within your Canvas course, or through the dedicated mobile app available to both iPhones and Android devices.
- Mt. SAC has a current Pronto license! It is already in our account. Create an open communication channel for instructors with students and students to communicate with each other.
- Counts as RSI and abides by all FERPA guidelines for merged classes.
- Because Pronto is integrated into Canvas, it is recommended that faculty use Pronto instead of Discord or Remind.
- Learn more about Pronto at the [Mt. SAC Faculty Center](#).

## Assessments

Assessments give students a way to demonstrate their learning. Assessments should demonstrate learning outcomes and align with course objectives. Both formative and summative assessments should be used, and assessments should be deployed frequently enough to give students timely feedback and generate RSI.

### Include a Variety of Assessments

Including a variety of assessments makes your course more engaging and gives students different ways to demonstrate mastery and active participation. This can help students who have strengths in some types of assessment but not others (test-taking or writing, for instance).

- Formative assessments provide low-stakes opportunities for students to practice and get feedback to improve. They scaffold learning and often enable community building as well.
- Summative assessments evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark. Summative assessments are also where you ask students to “put it together” and demonstrate critical thinking, analysis, and synopsis.

### Write Detailed Instructions

In online courses, particularly asynchronous ones, students can't ask many questions about how to do an assessment. Therefore, it is important that you provide clear instructions.

Whatever your topic, consider:

- Is what students are asked to do clear? Can you recognize what questions get asked often and answer them in the instructions before you are asked?
- Is the relevance to the course made plain? Does the assignment relate to the learning objectives?

- Is the evaluation process transparent? Do you specify what elements will be graded and are there clear dimensions of scoring?

Research shows that students connect these qualities, along with timely feedback, to the fairness of a course.

## Structure Assessments to Help Students

To help students, have all the instructions for the assessment where they submit it. Don't have students scroll to other modules to find the instructions for an assessment.

For discussions, place students in groups to prevent the "scroll of death" which can overwhelm a whole class discussion of 35+ students. (And if you are using merged course shells, be sure that all groups are within the same CRN.)

## RSI in Assessments

Assessments are a major way for instructors to deliver RSI. They are also the only element that "leaves a trace" in your course so that a reviewer or evaluator can see what kind of interaction you have had.

- Individually written feedback comments, use of a detailed embedded rubric, annotations, video or audio feedback describing the substantive content of the assignment count as RSI. This interaction would be delivered through SpeedGrader.
- Use of rote phrases ("good job!" "good job!" "good job!"), simple emojis, or the like are not considered RSI as they are not substantive. By the same token, directing students to an answer sheet does not demonstrate RSI as it is not substantive feedback. Corrections in auto-graded quizzes, even if you wrote those corrections, do not count as RSI since they are not interactive.
- Besides giving detailed feedback on assessments, it is important that you plan enough assessments to meet the "regular, scheduled, and predictable" requirements for RSI. Unlike an in-person course, an online course cannot merely consist of a midterm, final, and big paper. You need to plan assessments at predictable, scheduled intervals and grade them consistently to demonstrate RSI. That's why it is a best practice to include your goals at providing feedback in a Communication Plan in your orientation.
- It should go without saying that waiting until you have weeks of grading to complete is not only unfair to the students who do not know how they are doing, it also threatens the college's accreditation by not demonstrating RSI.

## "Authentic Assessments"

"Authentic assessment" is the term given to an evaluation of whether a student can apply the knowledge and skills they learned from instructional content to a new situation or task. They typically take the form of a project or product of some kind. Instead of relying on recall or memorization, authentic assessments tend to be unique, personal, engage the student in critical thinking, are harder to copy, frequently have higher academic rigor, and are more time-consuming to grade.

## Invite Student Feedback

Eliciting student feedback on your course can make your course a better experience for students and for you. An anonymous survey is a good way to collect feedback. Awarding extra credit points will help drive participation.

You can choose four or five of the following questions or create your own to explore areas you want more information on.

- 1) What do you wish I knew about this class that would make me a better teacher?
- 2) Did I make it clear what was expected of you, both in general and for individual assignments? Were the instructions for activities understandable?
- 3) What did you like or not like about how the course material was organized?
- 4) Was there anything about the course that made it difficult for you or inhibited your learning? (For example, the way the course was set up, the types of materials used, the level of content.)
- 5) Did you feel there was a good balance between instruction and practice/application? (Examples to support your "yes" or "no" would be really helpful to me.)
- 6) How helpful was I? Did you feel comfortable letting me know when you had a question or were challenged by the material?
- 7) Did you find my feedback on assignments useful (consider things like amount, relevance, positive tone)?
- 8) What habit would you suggest I work on improving to be a better teacher in the future?
- 9) What comments can you offer to help me make this a better course?
- 10) Name one small thing I can do to be an amazing instructor.

## AI Considerations

The advent of generative AI tools presents both unique challenges and exciting pedagogical opportunities for faculty in DL courses. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Co-Pilot use algorithms – Large Language Models (LLMs) to mine content from the internet, documents or a database to determine patterns and generate new, human-like output.

### Equity

AI is trained on existing content. Even though many platforms put restrictions in place in terms of discriminatory, explicit or violent content, there is no guarantee that this information will not make its way into the content created. Access is also an issue. Some tools may be free but limited to older data sets. More recent premium versions are may be costly for students. Keep in mind that AI platforms have the potential to make the digital divide even greater.

### Detection

Several detectors exist that have the potential to determine the extent to which student work has been AI generated. Even if content is identified as AI-generated, it is important to note that these detectors are not a guarantee that AI has been used in a student submission. These tools use LLM technology to determine the ‘perplexity’ and ‘burstiness’ (randomness and variety) of text submitted. During the 2023-



2024 academic year the Educational Technology Committee recommended K16 Scaffold as an institutional AI detector. Additional free tools include:

- [Copyleaks Chrome Extension](#)
- [Origin Chrome Extension](#)

## Literacy & Workforce Readiness

AI literacy can be viewed in much the same way as other types of academic literacy skills – digital, information, media. Our students will need to be conversant with the following:

- Evaluation of AI technologies
- Communication and collaboration with AI
- The basics of how AI works
- Ethical use of AI

These skills are fast becoming priorities for hiring managers (Luciariello). [UNESCO](#) and the [California Department of Education](#) both have general AI competency frameworks in development and AI readiness and skill development has been identified as a strategic direction in the [California Community College Chancellor's Vision 2030](#)

## Communicate Your AI Policy with Your Students

Include an AI statement in your syllabus by adding a statement or clause to your Academic Integrity section. Faculty should determine which of the following are appropriate for the course:

- Use prohibited
- Use only with prior permission
- Use only with acknowledgement
- Use is freely permitted with no acknowledgement.

Sample syllabus statements for each of these options are included in the Academic Senate AI and Education Guide, accessible through the Mt. SAC Canvas Faculty Center (see link below).

## Resources for Online Instructors

[Artificial Intelligence and Education](#) page in the Mt. SAC Canvas Faculty Center. Includes links to Academic Senate AI and Education Guide.

Luciariello, Kate. "[New Amazon Study Reveals How AI Will Transform the Workplace in Five Years.](#)" Campus Technology, 2 Jan. 2024

## Course Design for eIntegrity

One of the most pressing concerns for faculty currently teaching online is how to create an environment conducive to attaining student learning outcomes and success while also maintaining integrity of

content and assessments. With the advent of Large Language Model (LLM) technology, this has become an even more critical issue when it comes to plagiarism and online writing assessments.

Students are inclined to engage in what we think of as ‘cheating’ if the following is present: opportunity, rationalization, incentive/pressure or need (Becker et al). Assignments that engage students in hands on/real world applications, that are intrapersonal, allow students to observe a phenomenon, use peers as resources and are collaborative will provide fewer opportunities for students to participate in unauthorized collaboration either with others and/or with content external to an assessment.

Short, smaller stakes **High Impact Practices (HIPs)** that are formative in nature and which **scaffold** tasks also follow best practices for eIntegrity. These include research assignments where students have to pull in content both from the internet and specific instructor-created course materials, collaborative assignments, ePortfolios and other self-assessments.

Strategies to prevent eIntegrity issues include the following:

- Raise awareness of course expectations through plagiarism training, discussions and class guidelines/norm-setting.
- Check-in/outreach to students who are struggling and/or tend to submit assignments late.
- Personalize the content and learning experience; establish a sense of community early on.
- Reassess assessments to be low-stakes, project-based, formative, and reflective in nature.
- Use prompts specific to your individual course and content; avoid prompts and assignments that are too general.

You can configure quizzes to discourage answer sharing.

- Use Question Banks and pull random questions.
- Shuffle answers
- Include short answer boxes

## Use of Plagiarism & Proctoring Software

There are several different types of software, sold by many different vendors, that attempt to ensure that students are not engaging in academic dishonesty when writing papers, taking quizzes or exams, or preparing other types of assessments. (Some proctoring products are extensions rather than software but for simplicity they will both be referred to as software.)

The College has subscribed to a plagiarism checker such as Turnitin/Unicheck which can be used to scan some student writing assignments to detect unattributed quoted or paraphrased content, similarities between student submissions, and similarities between a submission and a previous submission by another student.

Software that tries to detect or prevent cheating on quizzes and exams is often more problematic for many reasons. These problems can be based on how the software is implemented by the professor. Students often object to use of the software based on privacy violations, usually related to professors requiring the use of the computer’s camera during test- and quiz-taking. Some professors require that students turn on the camera before an online assessment, pan the test-taking room, show their identification, and take the exam with the camera turned on. Many students don’t want to have their test-taking environment recorded for a variety of reasons. Others don’t want their identification

recorded, or don't want their faces to be recorded. Some proctoring software, including the College's current software, Honorlock, allows faculty to turn off the camera requirement. Faculty should think about whether they need to record their students, their students' environments, or their identification.

### Considerations

- Think about whether you need to use proctoring software at all. If you decide to use it, access online training through POD so you thoroughly understand all the options.
- What features do you actually need? What are the least intrusive options you can choose that will accomplish your proctoring needs? Do you need to require the use of a camera, or could you instead lock the student's browser, disable printing, or take other steps available through many software products?
- If you're requiring that your students use proctoring software, tell them exactly how they will be monitored, and provide additional information, such as a link where they can learn more.
- Tell students they can remove the proctoring software between proctored assessments, and tell them how to do this.
- Might you shorten test-taking time so students have less time to look at unauthorized sources?
- Consider ways to avoid using proctoring software altogether, including the suggestions made above.

### eIntegrity Resources for Online Instructors

- [WCET Assessment & Academic Integrity](#)
- [Study: Online Exam Cheating is Up](#)
- [Course Content & Course Assignments: Considerations to Help with Student Plagiarism](#)
- [Academic Integrity in Online Assessment: A Research Review](#)

### High Impact Practices

- [Peralta Equity Rubric](#)
- [High-Impact Practices Enliven Staid Online Course Format](#)
- [High-Impact Practices AACU](#)
- [Scaling High Impact Practices](#)

### Examples & Guides

- [ePortfolio Project Overview Example](#)
- [ePortfolio Assignment Example](#)
- [Canvas Commons: Plagiarism & Academic Honesty: Overview](#)
- [Canvas Commons: Plagiarism & Academic Honesty: Avoiding Plagiarism](#)
- [Canvas Commons: Plagiarism & Academic Honesty: Help from Others](#)
- [Mt. SAC About Citations Lib Guide](#)
- [Mt. SAC Doing Research Lib Guide](#)

*Did We Miss Something?*

We want to support you and your students! Do you need more information? Have a suggestion for a topic? Need more clarification? [Please contact us.](#)

# Sample Pages

## Department Minutes Sample Page for DL Action

Curriculum Updates and Modifications					
Course Prefix & Number	Course Name	Units	Changes	DL action: (adding new, renewing, removing) No DL at this time	Parity
SAMP 101	Introduction to Curriculum	3	Minor edits and sample alignment updates to align with MO	No DL at this time	No parity, lecture only

## Technology Resources Sample Page

The Mt. SAC IT Help Desk can provide assistance with Canvas log-in issues and help with Mt. SAC provided technology. You can contact the IT Help Desk:

- via email at [helpdesk@mtsac.edu](mailto:helpdesk@mtsac.edu)
- by phone at (909) 274-4357 (HELP)
- through the website for the [Mt. SAC Help Desk](#)
- by clicking on the Support tab in your [Mt. SAC Portal](#)

Help Desk Hours and Walk-In Support:

- Walk-in support hours: Monday-Friday 08:00 am – 4:30 pm, Building 23 room 6150
- Phone support hours: Monday-Thursday: 7:30 am – 10:00 pm, Friday: 7:30 am – 7:00 pm

### Student Technology Support Webpage

[Student Technology Support](#) provides information on the variety of technology resources available to students at Mt. San Antonio College including student printing, technology loans, and campus Wifi access.

### Mt. SAC Laptop Loaner Program

Plan to have reliable technology and internet access so that you may be successful in this online course. A cell phone alone will not suffice for assignment submissions. I want you to be successful, so please be sure you have access to a computer, or request one from the College program.

Need a laptop and/or internet hotspot loaner? Mt. SAC is distributing laptops to students. To submit a request, visit the [Mt. SAC Laptop Loaner Program](#).

### Canvas Support

#### Student Canvas Overview

In the [Canvas Overview video](#) you can learn about the Canvas Dashboard and Global Navigation links, navigating a course, and accessing assignments.

### Search the Canvas Guides

The following Canvas Guides can help you find answers to common questions.

- [Canvas Video Guides](#)
- [Canvas Student Guide](#)

### ASAC Canvasadors

Canvas Ambassadors ([Canvasadors](#)) are students dedicated to supporting peers' success in their classes. They share their knowledge of Canvas and other services and resources to give students every advantage at Mt. SAC. They can help you set up your course to get important notifications, contact your professor, and access assignments.

### Contact your Professor

If you have explored the Canvas Guides and are still having trouble, or are waiting on a response from the Help Desk, let your professor know! Even if your professor can not solve the problem, they can always help guide you to the appropriate resource.

### Mt. SAC Student Hub

[The Mountie Student Hub](#) connects students with the information and Mt. SAC services they need from where they are: in Canvas! The icon is pictured left and looks like a backpack. This resource has lots of tutorials and information about Canvas, how to be successful in online classes, and campus resources. In the Hub you will find:

- Useful Canvas info for students
- What to know about taking online courses at Mt. SAC
- Links to many helpful campus services & resources for students
- Videos about cool locations and people at Mt. SAC
- Connections to Mt. SAC news and social media

### Mt. SAC Online

[Mt. SAC Online](#) is a student support page for getting started online. "One Step at a time. One class at a time."

### Copyright Guide

The Library provides essential information about copyright in this link.