Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between instructors and students is an essential component of quality online and distance education.

In online courses, there must be regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between instructors and students. RSI complies with Department of Education regulations, and also provides a hallmark of effective online teaching!

**What is Regular Interaction?**
- Be with an instructor.
- Be initiated by the instructor.
- Be scheduled and predictable.
- Be academic in nature and relevant to the course.

**What is Substantive Interaction?**
Includes direct instruction, such as:
- Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework.
- Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course.
- Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course.

View the Infographic “Regular and Substantive Interaction” Online
In our Spring 2023 series of the Stearns Center Digital Learning Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we will review tips and practices to create a learning environment that cultivates online quality through **Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)**.

In this first issue, we’ll review what defines **Regular and Substantive Interaction** in an online course. We also will discuss how **Regular and Substantive Interaction** distinguishes Distance Education from Correspondence Education, per the US Department of Education. We’ll see how strategies for online course design and teaching fall across a range for Regular and Substantive Interaction, and provide guidance for how to infuse additional RSI into your online course activities.

In our next issues, we’ll share some tips for how you can build **regular** online presence and interaction with your students; and we will share instructor practices for **substantive** interaction with students online, e.g., direct instruction, explaining academic content, providing constructive feedback, responding to questions, and participating in discussions and other activities in an online course.

Throughout the rest of Spring 2023 Newsletter series, we will do a “deeper dive” into RSI practices and strategies, mapping to our online quality checklist, and sharing practices of Mason faculty.

Use this Newsletter information as you teach your Spring 2023 online courses, making sure that you include regular and substantive interaction in your course design and teaching.

**WHAT IS REGULAR & SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION (RSI)?**

- **Regular and substantive interactions (RSI)** are instructor-initiated online interactions, which are **regular**, **frequent**, and **predictable**; which are **academic in nature**, and which serve to **engage and support online student learning**.

- **RSI may take different online formats.** RSI may occur online between students and instructor(s) **synchronously** (when students are required to log in and participate in class at a specified time) and/or **asynchronously** (when students access instructional materials and activities online per specific deadlines).

- Through **RSI**, the **instructor promptly and proactively engages with students** to provide needed support for their online learning and success.
First and foremost, RSI is essential for quality online teaching & learning. As online instructor, your role is to guide, support, and engage students in their learning. Your regular presence and your substantive & active interactions with students in your online course will foster their learning and success.

RSI is an essential requirement for distance education courses, per U.S. Department of Education (DOE)

DOE requires regular and substantive interaction (RSI) in online courses for which students use Title IV funds (see U.S. Department of Education Issues Final Rules on Distance Education and Innovation, 2020).

RSI is more than a federal requirement, It is the foundation of effective online teaching and learning!
Here’s an infographic (below) which shows the scale or range of Regular and Substantive Interaction in online courses. Examples of online activities and course elements may range from those which do not require or involve interaction with instructor (red zone in the graphic), those in which there is some instructor-initiated interaction although not individualized or specifically-related to academic course content (yellow zone in the graphic), to those which fully meet the requirements of RSI (green zone in the graphic). Red zone activities typify correspondence education while green zone activities define distance education, per US Department of Education. The Department of Education regulations do not specify the amount or type of RSI to include in online courses; this infographic can provide guidance!

You can view “How Do My Online Course Design & Teaching Show Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)?” infographic online here.
RSI is important for quality online teaching and learning. In this issue, we defined regular and substantive interaction. Its importance, and how RSI is used to distinguish correspondence education from distance education. We will be exploring tips for regular interaction, and for substantive interaction in the next issues of Spring 2023 series of the Stearns Center Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter.

In summary, Regular and Substantive Interaction must meet the following criteria (according to Department of Education):

- Interaction must be initiated by the instructor.
- Interaction must be “regular”, i.e., predictable, timely, and frequent.
- Interaction must be “substantive”, that is, of an academic nature relevant to course content.
- Interaction must be with an instructor who meets accrediting agency standards (for institution and/or discipline).

Overall, Regular and Substantive Interaction is all about quality teaching online!

Want to Learn More about RSI?

- **Regular and Substantive Interaction: An Overview. (SUNY ONLINE)**
  - Summary of RSI and how it relates to quality standards for online course design and teaching. Particularly helpful is the image “RSI Illustrator” to show the role of RSI in distance education (online courses).

  - Review of current RSI definition (per DOE); guidance and lines; examples of best practices for online courses.

Contact Us!

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