

Imperial Valley College Regular and Effective Contact Policy for Distance Education

Background

In hybrid or fully online courses, ensuring regular effective contact guarantees that the student receives the benefit of the instructor's presence in the learning environment both as a provider of instructional information and as a facilitator of student learning. In a face to face course, the instructor is present at each class meeting and interacts via all class announcements, lectures, activities and discussions that take a variety of forms. For example, discussions can be held as part of a lecture format, group work scenarios, or content review sessions. The instructor also serves as a content advisor when he or she answers questions both as they come up in class and as they arise in individual situations. These types of questions are dealt with via the telephone, email, or face to face office visits.

Title 5 regulations do not make a distinction between regular and distance education courses beyond the need to have a separate curriculum approval process and the need to ensure regular effective contact. Therefore, it is assumed that those qualities of regular effective contact described above for the face to face environment should also be applied to the distance education situation. The distance education guidelines require colleges to develop a policy regarding regular effective contact that addresses "the type and frequency of interaction appropriate to each distance education course/section or session."

Imperial Valley College Policy

All distance education courses at Imperial Valley College, whether hybrid or fully online, will include regular effective contact as described below:

1. Initiated interaction and frequency of contact. Instructors will regularly initiate interaction with students to determine that they are accessing and comprehending course material and that they are participating regularly in the activities in the course. Distance education courses are considered the "virtual equivalent" of face to face courses. Therefore, the frequency of the contact will be at least the same as would be established in a regular, face-to-face course. At the very least, the number of instructor contact hours per week that would be available for face to-face students, will also be available, in asynchronous and/or synchronous mode, with students in the distance education format. Contact shall be distributed in a manner that will ensure that regular contact is maintained, given the nature of asynchronous instructional methodologies, over the course of a week and should occur as often as is appropriate for the course. A response time of 24-48 hours, Monday through Friday, is desirable but may vary based on course requirements and extenuating circumstances. It must be clear whether or not the instructor will be available after hours or on weekends and holidays.
2. Establishing expectations and managing unexpected instructor absence. An instructor and/or department-established policy describing the frequency and timeliness of instructor initiated contact and instructor feedback, will be posted in the syllabus and/or other course documents that are made available for students when the course officially opens each semester. If the instructor must be out of contact briefly for an unexpected reason (such as illness or a family emergency that takes the instructor offline), notification to students will be made in the announcements area of the course that includes when the students can expect regular effective contact to resume. If the offline time results in a lengthy absence (a week or more), a substitute instructor should be sought

who can assist students while the instructor is unavailable. If, for whatever reason, a faculty member is unable to comply with the regular, timely, and effective contact guidelines set forth, students must be informed via email or high priority announcement as to when they can expect regular, timely, and effective contact to resume.

3. Type of Contact Regarding the type of contact that will exist in all Imperial Valley College distance learning courses, instructors will use the following resources to maintain contact with students:
 - a. Orientation material;
 - b. Weekly announcements in the course management system;
 - c. Threaded discussion boards within the course management system with appropriate instructor participation ("Questions for the Instructor" forums are good, but should be used in conjunction with other forums);
 - d. Email contact within or outside Blackboard (response to student emails recommended within 24-48 hours); and
 - e. Timely feedback for student work (recommended within 7-10 days).

In addition to items a through e above, it is recommended that instructors use at least two or more of the following