

Federal Guidelines for Online/Hybrid Course Development

[Federal Regulations on Distance Education \(DE\)](#) go into effect July 1, 2021, defining specific requirements and guidelines for the delivery of online/hybrid courses. As a result, online/hybrid course offerings at LMU will need to be compliant with this new guidance in order for the university to maintain accreditation.

The updates to the federal distance education regulations require that online and hybrid courses demonstrate evidence of **regular and substantive interactions** between the students and the instructor in both synchronous and asynchronous online courses. This requirement is designed to ensure that online courses are not simply correspondence courses and that students can access support resources despite the lack of a physical classroom or frequent campus visits.

Effective for online/hybrid courses for Summer 2021 and beyond, LMU faculty teaching in an online modality will be responsible for meeting these new federal guidelines.

These new federal regulations establish the expectation that a distance education course must have regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor.

“**Substantive interaction**” is defined as “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.

“**Regular interaction**” requires an “the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency.” The “instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student.”

Further guidance can be gleaned from the Department’s definition of “**academic engagement**” which is “[a]ctive participation by a student in an instructional activity related to the student’s course of study” as defined by an institution consistent with any requirements imposed by its state approval or accrediting agency.

Academic engagement can include:

- Attending a synchronous class, lecture, recitation, or field or laboratory activity, physically or online, where there is opportunity for interaction between the instructor and students (merely logging into class is insufficient without further participation);
- Turning in an academic assignment or taking a test;
- Participating in an interactive tutorial, webinar, or other computer-assisted instruction;
- Participating in a faculty led or directed study group, group project, or an online discussion; or
- Interacting with the instructor regarding academic matters.

Federal Guidelines for Online/Hybrid Course Development

To address these new federal requirements and maintain our accreditation status, it has been suggested that faculty make the following specific updates to syllabi for online and hybrid courses.

In particular, online course syllabi should:

- Briefly describe types of interaction that students can expect in the class and how they relate to learning.
- Explicitly state how student learning will be assessed and how feedback on assignments will be given to students.
- Indicate preferred methods and approximate turnaround times for faculty to provide feedback to students on assignments, discussion boards, emails, etc.
- Articulate what students can expect from the instructor regarding predictable and regular interaction by explicitly including:
 - How frequently the class meets synchronously including dates/times? If not meeting synchronously, what can students expect from asynchronous interaction to ensure regular interaction between instructor and students?
 - How will the faculty engage with students to support student success through timely and proactive communications?
 - How will faculty track student engagement?

To maintain accreditation, it is recommended that syllabi, and ultimately course delivery for online/hybrid courses, describe and deliver “predictable and scheduled” interactions between faculty and students during asynchronous weeks of study. As part of this effort, faculty partners have engaged with the Center for Teaching Excellence and the Office of Online Learning to develop and approve an updated [Syllabus Checklist](#) for online/hybrid courses at LMU.

If you are teaching an online/hybrid course and require assistance in articulating these new syllabus requirements or if you would like support in identifying tools and strategies that demonstrate regular and substantive online interactions, please reach out to the [Office of Online Learning](#) or contact the [Center for Faculty Development](#) for assistance.

