



Pilot Addendum to the Protocol for Distance Education Review

(Current DE Protocol is Appendix B in the [Accreditation Handbook](#))

This pilot addendum is intended to assist peer reviewers in conducting their assessment of the quality of distance education that the institution delivers in accordance with ACCJC's [Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education](#) and the *Protocol for Distance Education Review* outlined in Appendix B in the [Accreditation Handbook](#) to verify substantive and regular interaction.

Peer Review teams will:

- utilize the *pilot DE Assessment Tool for Peer Reviewers (an Excel spreadsheet)* to determine whether or not an institution meets the 85% threshold for substantive and regular interaction in the sample of course sections it reviews;
- complete this *pilot Addendum to the Protocol for Distance Education Review* to summarize their findings in the course of the peer review process and engage in dialogue with fellow team members; and
- reflect on the *Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education* to provide constructive feedback to the institution on areas where the college could improve in the Peer Review Team Report in the context of Standard 2.6.

Instructions:

Please complete the *pilot DE Assessment Tool for Peer Reviewers (an Excel spreadsheet)* to indicate which course sections met or did not meet the expectations for substantive and regular interaction and then add a summary of your findings below.

If less than 85% of the course sections the team reviews meet the expectations for regular and substantive interaction, then the team must write a core inquiry if the review of course sections occurs leading up to the Team ISER Review, or a compliance recommendation if the review of course sections occurs as part of the focused site visit.

Summary of Findings

- a. Number of course sections provided by the institution and reviewed by the team: _____
- b. Number of course sections that met the policy expectations for substantive and regular interaction:
_____ Met _____ Not Met
- c. Percentage of course sections that that met the policy expectations for substantive and regular interaction:
_____ %

Substantive Interaction:

Each course section reviewed must include **at least two of the following methods** of interaction to qualify as meeting the expectations for substantive interaction per the *ACCJC Policy on Distance Education (DE) and on Correspondence Education*:

- a) direct instruction (only synchronous instruction qualifies);
- b) assessment and feedback on coursework;
- c) information/responses to questions about course content; and/or
- d) facilitating group discussions.

In your assessment of the courses, how well is the institution providing substantive interaction overall?

Include brief narrative to describe your findings:

Regular Interaction:

Each course section reviewed must include **evidence of both activities** to qualify as meeting the expectations for regular interaction per the *ACCJC Policy on Distance Education (DE) and on Correspondence Education*, that the instructor is:

- a) providing opportunity for substantive interaction on a regular and predictable basis, and
- b) monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

In your assessment of the courses, how well is the institution providing regular interaction overall?

Include brief narrative to describe your findings:

For Team ISER Review:

If 85% of the course sections reviewed met the conditions for substantive and regular interaction, please describe the team’s findings within the narrative of the team report in the context of Standard 2.6. Provide strengths and/or suggestions to improve substantive and regular interaction as you consider the *ACCJC Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education* and based on the sample reviewed.

If 85% of the course sections reviewed did not meet the conditions for substantive and regular interaction, or it is not clear from the evidence provided, please describe the team’s observations in a Core Inquiry to learn more during the focused site visit.

For Focused Site Visit:

If 85% of the course sections reviewed met the conditions for substantive and regular interaction, please describe the team’s findings within the narrative of the team report in the context of Standard 2.6. Provide strengths and/or suggestions to improve substantive and regular interaction as you consider the *ACCJC Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education* and based on the sample reviewed.

If 85% of the sample did not meet the conditions for substantive and regular interaction, the team must write a Recommendation for Compliance. This type of recommendation is a statement of a peer review team’s professional judgment regarding actions an institution must take in order to resolve areas of deficiency or noncompliance related to a Standard, group of related Standards, and/or Commission policy.

If the course sections reviewed seem to be meeting the conditions for substantive and regular interaction at a minimal level (i.e. Initial level which is considered baseline in the *ACCJC Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education*), write a Recommendation for Improving Institutional Effectiveness and document your findings in Standard 2.6 to improve substantive and regular interaction. In contrast to recommendations for compliance, recommendations for improving institutional effectiveness do not signify areas of current noncompliance with Standards; rather, they indicate areas where deficiencies may emerge if the institution does not make adjustments to its current practices or policies.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. In an asynchronous course section, does providing voiceover PowerPoint presentations count as direct instruction?

No, direct instruction is only a method considered by the Department of Education in live synchronous course sections.

2. If synchronous course sections are included in the sample the peer reviewers evaluate, will they need to view recorded Zoom meetings?

No, ACCJC does not require observation of recorded Zoom meetings; peer reviewers will review the syllabus to verify that the course section was synchronous, and the content covered by the instructor, in order to validate direct instruction.

3. The institution uses various third-party platforms and technologies to communicate and engage with students in the asynchronous course sections. How can this be made available to peer reviewers?

Institutions should provide instructor level access to the course sections being reviewed so that peer reviewers can observe the interactions. The institution must have methods to ensure that the instructor's interaction with students is substantive and regular.

4. The ACCJC *Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education* refers to the term 'Instructor'. Our institution uses different terminology. What if we have a teaching aide in the course section providing feedback to students, is that okay?

ACCJC expects colleges to have policies and procedures related to the hiring of qualified personnel for their roles at the institution. ACCJC does not dictate the title of persons providing instructional content and relies on the institution to abide by its policies in accordance with Accreditation Standard 3.1.

5. How frequently does an instructor need to interact with students to qualify for regular interaction?

ACCJC relies on institutions to set their own policies and procedures in the context of their mission and expectations for particular programs or courses, as well as curriculum development processes that would identify what is appropriate given varying lengths of time and amount of content in any given course or competency.

6. My institution requires office hours for each course section; however, students do not always attend. Does just having office hours count for regular interaction (Part A of the definition for regular interaction)?

Yes, the Department of Education clarified this expectation as follows, "an institution meets the requirement for regular interaction between students and instructors by, in part, providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a scheduled and predictable basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency. This requirement could be met if instructors made themselves available at a specific scheduled time and through a specific modality (e.g., an online chat or videoconference) for students to interact about the course material, regardless of whether the students chose to make use of this opportunity or interact with the instructor at the scheduled time."

7. My course section relies on a third-party vendor that automatically grades my students' quizzes and tests. Does providing these grades count as substantive interaction?

No, per the Department of Education, "a grade on an assignment alone does not qualify as substantive interaction" unless the instructor evaluates the student's work and provides specific feedback to the student about that work. The Department specifically notes, "an automated grading system that provides feedback based on a programmed response to input does not count as 'substantive' because it is interaction with a computer, not an instructor."

8. Should the course section sample reflect the overall institutional percentage mix of asynchronous and synchronous 100% online classes?

The sample should be randomly selected from all course sections offered at the institution that qualify as Distance Education, per the ACCJC *Policy on Distance and on Correspondence Education*. This includes synchronous and asynchronous courses, and any other methods where the instructor is physically separated from students. If a course section includes any in-person physical meetings, those courses should be eliminated from the sampling process.

9. How should my institution conduct the random sample?

Institutions can work with their research staff to identify the random sample, or they can use something like the 'Random Number' function in Excel to identify a subset of courses listed in a spreadsheet. Once identified, they can work with their LMS Administrator or other appropriate staff, such as information technology personnel, to make the courses available to the peer reviewers.

10. As a peer reviewer, I am observing class sections that have substantive interaction per the two methods required, and the regular interaction expectations. However, the substantive and regular interaction appears to be mostly at the 'initial level'. What should I do?

If you have observed that there is substantive and regular interaction in 85% or more of the course sections you reviewed (even if mostly at the Initial level per the *Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education*) then you may reflect on the rubric and provide feedback to the college to assist them with deepening and strengthening the quality of substantive and regular feedback (either in the narrative of the report or with a Recommendation for Improvement if this review occurs during the Focused Site Visit).

11. Why doesn't ACCJC monitor student-to-student interaction? I don't see any reference to it in the ACCC *Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education*, or in the *Quality Continuum Rubric for Distance Education*, or other ACCJC resources.

ACCJC is required to monitor quality in distance education per the federal regulations on this matter and does not ensure compliance with other State laws or regulations (such as ADA compliance) not within its jurisdiction.