



### Substantive and Frequent Interaction

Instructor-student interaction is a key component to learning, and this is no less true for distance education and online education. The interpretation of regular and substantive interactions have evolved over time. The current interpretation, based on Federal Regulation, is taken from the [Russ's analysis in 2011 of the St. Mary-of-the-Woods audit report](#), page 6.

Instructor-initiated interaction should occur as often as appropriate for regular contact, as defined by regulation. Substantive/Non-trivial interaction with students and delivery of course content includes instructor interaction with the entire group of students in the course section based on a well-defined schedule of availability, deadlines, feedback, and exchanges that are included in the instructor's Syllabus. The four key criteria are:

1. Interaction must be initiated by the instructor.
2. Interaction must be "regular" and probably somewhat frequent. (Regular is ambiguous here. The expectation is that that the instructor interacts with students on a fairly set schedule and that those communications not be too far apart.)
3. Interaction must be "substantive" – of an academic nature.
4. Interaction must be with an instructor or instructor's assistant.

### Means of Accomplishing "Frequent" Interaction

Must include, to meet requirements of the UNM Rubric

- Regular deadlines, distributed throughout the term of the course, for assignments and other student participation.
- Regular, timely, appropriate feedback and evaluation of student work.
- Strategy and clear directions for how students can ask questions.

Should include at least one or two of the following, but are not limited to:

- Threaded discussion forums with regular and appropriate instructor participation based on course topics and specific content of the course addressed to all students and/or to individuals publicly.
- E-mail and/or messages within the UNM Learn.
- Regularly Posted Announcements.
- Virtual online office hours.



### Instruction and Setting Expectations for Interaction

- Instructor-prepared online lectures, podcasts or other forms of addressing course content and topics, presented in an appropriate format for the subject, such as written documents, audio and/or video files, and/or introductions and explanations for any publisher created materials (written, audio and/or video, etc.) that, combined with other course materials, creates the “virtual equivalent” of the face-to-face class.
- Instructor-prepared Syllabus, specific to each course section, to document how regular contact between the students and the instructor is achieved.
- Guidelines for frequency of contact at least equivalent to contact in face-to-face classrooms.
- Defined manner & response time for student questions and assignment feedback.
- Establishing an active presence in the class.
- Frequent and substantive feedback throughout the course.
- Include course policies defining student-initiated contact (e.g., where to post questions, and examples of types of questions) in the instructor’s Syllabus.

### Tools/Strategies for “substantive/non-trivial interaction”

May include, but are not limited to:

- Instructor-guided introductions, especially at the beginning of the course.
- Daily or weekly assignments and projects that promote collaboration among students.
- Questions posed on the discussion board that encourage critical thinking skills and promote interaction among students.
- Regular participation by the instructor in discussion activities with students, perhaps to provide a summary, to correct errors of fact, to keep the discussion on topic, and/or to add expertise to the content of the discussion.
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### Examples of Regular and Substantive Interaction:

#### Regular Interaction:

**Example of an email statement indicating an estimated time for response to student emails:**

“Your instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends.”

**Example of a feedback expectation statement:**

“Assignments are due on Tuesday evening by 5:00 pm. All grades will be posted one week later, the following Tuesday by 5:00 pm.”

**Example of a discussion board post expectation:**

“Your instructor will respond to discussion board questions within 48 hours. Questions posted after Friday at 12 pm will not be responded to until Monday morning.”

**Substantive/Non-trivial Interactions:****Example of an email statement to correct an error of fact or comprehension:**

“The point you made in the last discussion post was accurate, but the dates of the conflict were slightly later, perhaps around 1776. Read the earlier posts of the first group to get a better sense of the issues surrounding the conflict and the time period required for completion of the war.”

- \* Monitoring student interaction and activity to ensure that they participate fully.
- \* Create a specific forum for questions regarding course content.
- \* Asking students for feedback about the course on a regular basis and revising the content as needed to address issues identified.
- \* Varied types of interaction, such as instructor-student, student-student, student-content, and student-instructor, and other interaction between and among the students and the instructor as part of the course design.

**Of note:**

- \* It is highly recommended that you use the Course Messages tool inside UNM Learn for communication with students, rather than the Email Tool, which goes out to your regular email. This allows documentation of interactions and can be easily accessed when needed, even in subsequent semesters.



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## Extended Learning

Online Course Development & Faculty Services

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