

# Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in Online and Distance Learning

## UNO Faculty Resource Guide

### OVERVIEW

This document provides additional information and helpful resources to University of Nebraska – Omaha (UNO) faculty related to UNO’s RSI policy. Read UNO’s official [RSI Policy](#) here.

The U.S. Department of Education requires that all online courses, which fall under the definition of distance education and for which students may use Title IV funds (federal financial aid) "ensure that there is regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty." While RSI requirements apply to all courses/programs UNO offers for academic credit, whether an individual student might or might not be able to receive federal financial aid, this resource guide focuses on those offered through a distance modality.

This policy applies to UNO employees and units developing, offering, and engaging in online programs, courses, and activities, including courses marked asynchronous (850 sections) or other comparable designations. The Department of Education has the authority to audit online courses and programs at institutions, like UNO, that receive federal funds. All UNO online courses are expected to meet this requirement and include regular and substantive interaction.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is more than a federal requirement, however. It is also a hallmark of effective teaching. Decades of research have established that teacher-student interactions are an essential component of learning (Baker, 2010; Betts, 2023; Kerensky & Poulin, 2022). So, while it may be tempting to see the Department of Education’s mandate as a burden imposed from outside the university, the reality is that ensuring regular and substantive interaction is entirely consistent with UNO's mission and values as an educational institution.

### WHAT IS RSI?

#### Initiated by Instructor

*Instructors should have an active presence in the course by initiating and guiding a range of interactions with students in a timely manner.* To count as ‘regular and substantive,’ interactions need to be started by you. This does not mean students should be discouraged from contacting you or asking questions – far from it! But you should expect to take an active part in initiating and guiding a range of interactions with your students throughout the semester. This ensures that interactions are not optional and left up to each student’s individual discretion; rather, they are an integral part of your instructional plan for the course.

#### Frequent and Consistent

*Interactions with students should be reasonably often and consistently recurrent throughout term where students are likely to grow to expect it.* This means that once a course begins, long intervals of time shouldn’t pass between the interactions you initiate with students. The mode of interaction may vary throughout the course, depending on your aims and the needs of your students, but the regular cadence of interactions you establish should remain as consistent as possible. Daily communication isn’t required, but at a minimum you should seek to interact with every student at least once each week and you should log in to the course every 1-2 days.

### **Focused on the Course Subject**

*Interactions should be connected to course subject and contribute to students' progress toward course and program learning objectives.* Routine procedural interactions, such as reminders of upcoming deadlines, aren't 'substantive' on their own; neither are activities like assigning grades, unless they are accompanied by personalized feedback or suggestions for improvement. This doesn't mean that interactions designed to welcome students or build classroom community aren't important, merely that they aren't sufficient by themselves.

### **✔ Course Design and Course Delivery Strategies that DO Meet RSI Standards**

- You post discussion board questions and actively facilitate conversation by responding to students.
- You post weekly announcements that answer common questions, summarize progress, & discuss course content.
- You post timely recorded video explaining concepts and posing questions for upcoming unit that require student responses.
- You define response time for feedback and emails in your syllabus or communication policy.
- You ask a student to visit you during office hours or to schedule a phone call or videoconference with you.
- You provide personalized comments (in any medium) for an individual student's assignment.
- You send a message previewing concepts introduced in the next unit and listing questions for students to have in mind when reading the textbook chapters.
- You post an example from last night's Cubs game in the course's 'Real-World Physics' discussion to illustrate the concept of coefficient of restitution.

### **✗ Course Design and Course Delivery Strategies that DON'T Meet RSI Standards**

- You post a discussion board question and give students points for participation.
- You sporadically post announcements as due date reminders.
- You post a pre-recorded video from a previous semester about main concepts of unit.
- You provide a statement in your syllabus that feedback and help will be provided but do not include specific details on timing or expectations.
- A student happens to drop in during your regularly scheduled office hours.
- You add numeric grades to the course gradebook.
- A student submits a quiz that is automatically graded.
- You send a welcome message during the first week of class and a mid-quarter message around week five.
- You encourage students to participate in an optional, one-time online review session before the final exam.
- You remind students of the course attendance policy.
- You post an announcement about an upcoming deadline.
- You post to the course's 'General Topics' discussion thread lamenting the outcome of last night's Bulls game.

## HOW DIGITAL LEARNING CAN SUPPORT FACULTY

Our support services are designed to create highly engaging, highly connected online/hybrid courses. These resources provide faculty with ongoing access to suggestions for how to incorporate regular and substantive interaction in your courses.

- **RSI Quick Check**

If you'd like to conduct a quick review of a course for regular and substantive interaction, a Course Design Review (CDR) is the perfect place to start. An instructional designer reviews a course of your choosing, that utilizes the Canvas LMS, according to an adapted version of the components of the SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric (OSCQR). By requesting a course design review, faculty are seeking feedback and suggestions about strategies to improve the flow and design of their digital course materials.

- **Online Course Development Grant**

If you believe you'd like to redevelop one of your online or hybrid courses, we offer Online Course Grants that support faculty in reviewing, updating, and creating quality online courses that aim to assist with UNO strategic goals. We can take you from start to finish as well as offer you funding for your additional efforts. This process utilizes Digital Learning's Online Course Quality Review Rubric (adapted version of the SUNY OSCQR) as an instrument for collaboration between faculty and Instructional Designers in quality online course design.

- **Additional Support for Course Enhancement**

We also offer a variety of one-on-one support, trainings, workshops, and resources that provide faculty with ongoing access to recommendations for how to incorporate regular and substantive interaction in their courses.

- [Advancing Excellence in Online Teaching Program](#)
- [Digital Learning Monthly Newsletter](#)
- [Digital Learning Workshops](#)
- [Book an Appointment](#)

## RESOURCES

### Additional Resources to Learn More About RSI

- [UNO Digital Learning Recommendations & Checklist for Promoting Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI\) in Online Classes \[PDF\]](#)
- [UNO Digital Learning Online Quality Review Rubric \(including standards specifically addressing or can be leveraged to support the requirements of RSI\) \[PDF\]](#)
- Education Resource Information Center's [Regular and Substantive Interaction: Background, Concerns, and Guiding Principles \[PDF\]](#)
- [SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric Regular Substantive Interaction Standards \[Website\]](#)

## Research Behind Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

As previously emphasized, the significance of consistent and meaningful interaction between educators and learners is firmly grounded in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Below is a brief selection representing the extensive body of relevant research:

- Baker, C. (2010). The impact of instructor immediacy and presence for online student affective learning, cognition, and motivation. *The Journal of Online Educators*, 7(1).
- Betts, K. (2023, March 2). Regular and substantive interaction: Resources to support learning, neuroplasticity, and regulations. *Frontiers, WCET*
- Boling, E. C. et al. (2012). Cutting the distance in distance education: Perspectives on what promotes positive, online learning experiences. *Internet and Higher Education* 15, 118-126.
- Dixon, M. D. (2010). Creating effective student engagement in online courses: What do students find engaging? *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(2), 1-13.
- Fink, L. D. (2013). Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses. Revised and updated edition. Jossey-Bass.
- Kerensky, K. (2021, August 26). Regular and substantive interaction refresh: Reviewing and sharing our best interpretation of current guidance and requirements. *Frontiers, WCET*
- Kerensky, K. & Poulin, R. (2022, November 8). Regular and substantive interaction update: Where do we go from here? *WCET Frontiers*.
- Online Learning Consortium. (2019). Regular and substantive interaction: Background, concerns, and guiding principles. York, C. S. & Richardson, J. C. (2012). Interpersonal interaction in online learning: Experienced online instructors' perceptions of influencing factors. *Online Learning Journal*, 16(4), 83-98.

## References

- Online Learning Consortium, UPCEA, WCET (n.d). Regular and substantive interaction: Background, concerns, and guiding principles. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593878.pdf>
- Poulin, R., & Davis, V. (n.d.). Interpreting regular and substantive interaction. WCET Frontiers. Retrieved from <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2016/09/30/interpreting-regular-and-substantive-interaction/>
- SUNY Online Resources. (n.d.). Course development tips: Regular and substantive interaction. Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/view/sunyo-resources/course-development-tips/regular-and-substantive-interaction>