

# **Distance Education Accreditation Quality Guidelines**

Allan Hancock College District is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), specifically the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). To ensure excellence in distance education, we follow the guidelines in the [WASC Distance Learning Manual](#). The main accreditation areas are listed below.

## **Curriculum development for online and technology-enhanced instruction**

- a. Guidelines regarding quality standards must be in place to guide course development, design, and delivery.
- b. Curriculum and instructional requirements determine the appropriate technology for course delivery.
- c. Online and partially online courses need to adhere to accreditation agencies' principles of best practices for electronically delivered instruction.
- d. Instructional materials must be reviewed and revised periodically to ensure they meet program standards.
- e. Courses must be designed to require students to engage in higher-order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) as part of their course and program requirements.
- f. All online materials must clearly and consistently be linked to AHC's academic standards.
- g. All courses must meet copyright compliance and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 508 accessibility standards to be responsive to the changing nature of a web-based digital media teaching-learning environment guided by industry standards and legislative rules and regulations.

## **Faculty development for adapting instruction for technology-mediated delivery**

- h. Technical assistance in course development needs to be made available to faculty, with convenient access to technical support staff.
  - You can email [askDL@hancockcollege.edu](mailto:askDL@hancockcollege.edu) or call extension xxxx for help with support or training any time.
  - Open office hours are from 9am to 10am and 2pm to 3pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays
  - Professional development sessions are offered during the semester, check the calendar for workshops and sessions.
- i. Faculty members must be assisted and guided in the transition from classroom teaching to online instruction.
  - For support in the transition from regular face-to-face to an online modality, faculty should contact Fred Patrick, Distance Education Specialist ([fpatrick@hancockcollege.edu](mailto:fpatrick@hancockcollege.edu), x. 3660). The CVC-OEI course design rubric is the document used for development of online courses.

- j. Faculty training for the online digital media environment must include instruction on using the interactive asynchronous and synchronous communication tools that provide effective levels of student contact, feedback and interaction important to learners.
- k. Faculty training and assistance, including peer mentoring, needs to be made available and continue through the progression of the technology mediated course.
  - Many departments have developed a peer review process that helps instructors through aspects of the online modality. Section B of the CVC-OEI rubric is used as criteria to meet the regular and substantive faculty initiated contact Academic Senate policy. Contact your department chair for information on your department's peer review process.

### **Student support for learning online**

- l. Students need to receive information about the course and/or program, including admission requirements, tuition and fees, books and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and student support services.
- m. Students need to be provided with supplemental course information, including course objectives, concepts, and ideas; and learning outcomes for each course are summarized in a clearly written, straightforward statement.
- n. Before participating in a technology-mediated course, students need to be effectively advised about the course to determine if they possess the self-motivation and commitment to learn at a distance and if they have access to the technology required by the course design and delivery approach.
- o. Students need to be provided with training and information to aid them in securing material through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, and other sources.
- p. Students need to have technical assistance and convenient access to technical support staff.
- q. Questions directed to student service personnel need to be answered quickly and accurately, with a structured system in place to also handle and respond to student complaints.
- r. Student interaction with faculty and with other students is an essential component for effective online learning and needs to be facilitated through a variety of ways, including discussion boards, chats, voice-mail and/or e-mail exchanges.
- s. Feedback to student questions and assignments needs to be constructive and provided in a timely manner.
- t. Students need to have access to sufficient library resources that may include a "virtual library" accessible through the World Wide Web.
- u. Faculty and students participating in online teaching-learning programs need to have agreement about expectations regarding times for student assignment completion and faculty response.

### **Technology Delivery System – Course Management System (CMS) - Canvas**

- v. The integrity and validity of the course information and user data must be assured via systematic backups to the server and server security systems. This is done through the CMS administrator. Your course and student information will be saved for three years.
- w. The reliability of the technology delivery system needs to operate as failsafe as possible.
- x. Technology support needs to be provided to assist with technical problems and questions on a 24/7 basis, with a response time not to exceed 12 hours.

### **Evaluation and Assessment of Effectiveness of Instruction**

- y. The educational effectiveness and the teaching and learning process for all technology-mediated courses must be assessed through an evaluation process that uses multiple methods and applies specific standards.
- z. Data on enrollment, retention, persistence, costs must be used to guide the evaluation of program effectiveness.
- aa. Intended learning outcomes need to be reviewed regularly to ensure clarity, utility, and appropriateness.

## **What This Means to You**

Several of the above accreditation guidelines have a direct impact on the design of your online course. In (d) for example, accreditors require that instructional materials be *"reviewed and revised periodically to ensure they meet program standards."* This is especially important in online classes, where technology is constantly changing, and new and better tools are made available to achieve the learning outcomes in a course.

In (r), accreditors highlight that *"Student interaction with faculty and with other students is an essential component for effective online learning."* You'll find several tools to interact with your students and to get your students communicating with each other in Canvas. These interactions create the foundation of learning communities, and they should be built into the design of your class.

As you see in accreditation area (s) above, *"Feedback to student questions and assignments needs to be constructive and provided in a timely manner."* In the online course, where students aren't seeing their instructor and can't raise their hands to get questions answered on-the-spot, it's essential to provide timely and effective feedback to students.

All of the above guidelines are important, not only because they are enforced by the ACCJC/WASC Accrediting Commission, but also because they result in a more successful educational experience for our students.

# Academic Integrity & Student Authentication

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In addition to the WASC Accreditation Guidelines, our courses at AHC must also comply with State and Federal Guidelines. One such Federal regulation is the [Higher Education Opportunity Act \(HEOA\) of 2008](#), which highlights student authentication and academic integrity as important issues for distance education. Specifically it states, in STAT. 3325, that:

*Accrediting agencies must require institutions that offer DE or correspondence education to have processes to establish that the student who registers is the same student who participates in and completes the work and gets the academic credit.*

## Student Authentication at AHC

To authenticate users of the AHC Canvas course management system, all students who are enrolled in distance education courses at Allan Hancock College are issued a secure username and password for access. The username and password are generated from the student information system registration rosters and are unique to each student. Access to the user database for assisting students with login issues is restricted to several key staff members at AHC.

## What This Means to You

Online instructors should be building academic integrity and student authentication into the design of their course. There are several ways that this can be done. The following are examples of prevention strategies and course design techniques the majority of our online faculty use to promote student academic integrity:

1. Include a statement about academic integrity in their course syllabus.
2. Check student assignments for plagiarism and for cheating.
3. Require written work from the student (for example, papers, online discussions, exam essay questions).
4. Use a variety of assessments (for example, quizzes, projects, portfolios, group work).
5. Include information in the course about avoiding academic dishonesty (for example, learning how to cite sources).
6. Set a time limit on exams as another strategy for limiting collaboration and cheating.
7. Randomize the quiz or exam questions so that no two students receive the same set of questions.
8. Require multi-part projects or progressive submissions of in-process work.
9. Recognize student's work through trends and writing styles in discussions and assignments.

10. Use multiple measures of assessing student learning.
11. Have classmates do peer review of each other's essays.
12. Have students explain their work in the class discussions.

Several additional strategies to promote academic integrity and student authentication were reported in a survey of the members of the Instructional Technology Council, combined with feedback from WCET, and UT TeleCampus of the University of Texas System, "Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education, Version 2.0, June 2009, [Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education.pdf](#).

Technical strategies for authentication are reviewed by the Distance Learning Committee by examining tools offered by vendors such as Acxiom, Respondus, and ProctorU to determine their feasibility and potential for verifying student identity in distance education courses. Hancock has access to Proctorio through funding at the CVC-OEI. However, that is not expected to be renewed and the district will be looking for proctoring software in the fall of 2020.

## Proctoring

Faculty can require their exams to be proctored, either on campus or remotely. The California Community College Distance Education Coordinators have developed a reciprocal agreement for proctoring each others' students.

## Regular and Substantive Contact

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### ***Regular and Substantive Interaction Between Student and Teacher***

- *Is central in determining whether a course is distance education rather than correspondence education.*
- *Is needed in every course that is fully or partially online and in the online elements of hybrid courses.*
- *Must be demonstrable and documented.*
- *Is vital to a college's relationship with the U.S. Department of Education for student financial aid eligibility.*
- *Is key to quality education and the student outcomes required by the ACCJC Accreditation Standards.*

We've already seen that the ACCJC/WASC accreditors require student-student interactions and student-instructor interactions. This is echoed by the requirement for "regular effective contact" by the California Code of Regulations Title 5 and the Distance Education Guidelines. Excerpts from Title 5 and the [Distance Education Guidelines](#) for the California Community Colleges state:

**55202. Course Quality Standards.**

*The same standards of course quality shall be applied to any portion of a course conducted through distance education as are applied to traditional classroom courses. Determinations and judgments about the quality of distance education under the course quality standards shall be made with the full involvement of faculty.*

**55204. Instructor Contact.**

*In addition to the requirements of section 55002 and any locally established requirements applicable to all courses, district governing boards shall ensure that:*

*(a) Any portion of a course conducted through distance education includes regular effective contact between instructor and students, through group or individual meetings, orientation and review sessions, supplemental seminar or study sessions, field trips, library workshops, telephone contact, correspondence, voice mail, e-mail, or other activities.*

## Background

In online courses, **Faculty Initiated Regular and Substantive Instructor/Student 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. The classroom 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. 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. The guidelines do say that quality assurances within the regulations apply to all DE courses, which include hybrid courses. 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 DE Guidelines require colleges to develop a policy regarding regular effective contact that addresses "the

type and frequency of interaction appropriate to each DE course/section or session."

## Regular and Substantive Contact in Online Courses at AHC

All DE courses at AHC, whether fully online, or hybrid (blended) will include regular and Substantive contact as described below:

- **Initiated interaction:** 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. Providing students with an open-ended question forum or responding to questions via email, although appropriate, does not constitute the entirety of effective instructor-initiated interaction. There must be **instructor-initiated** communication.
- **Frequency:** DE Courses are considered the “virtual equivalent” to face-to-face courses. Therefore, the frequency of the contact will be at least equivalent to that 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 DE format. Contact shall be distributed in a manner that will **ensure** that regular contact is maintained over the course of a week and occurs as often as is appropriate for the course.
- **Establishing expectations and managing unexpected instructor absence:** A 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 and substantive contact to resume.

There are several options when it comes to initiating contact with students in Canvas.

# First and Last Day of Attendance

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## ***Sample "Last Day of Attendance" Policy***

*When a student has not participated in discussions or other forms of communication and/or has not submitted assignments for two consecutive weeks, the instructor will attempt to contact the student and notify them that they have 5 days to complete the missing work or be dropped from the course. The instructor will document the student's work until the point of dropping the student.*

U.S. Federal financial aid is awarded based on attendance in class. In an on-campus course, a student's physical presence is the way that first and last date of attendance are recorded.

How does the U.S. Department of Education determine attendance in an *online* class? In an online course, **merely logging in is not sufficient**. "Meaningful participation" is the requirement by the U.S. Department of Education. The first and last date of attendance is the last known "academically related activity" that the student has completed. It is not considered the last login of the student: <http://wcet.wiche.edu/advance/financial-aid-and-distance-education>

In brief, the "last day of attendance" is to determine the amount of aid a student is eligible to receive when that student withdraws or leaves a program without officially notifying the institution. For online programs, some institutions use the last login of that student as the "last day of attendance."

According to the U.S. Department of Education, faculty will be required to report the last date of "known academic activity" for all students enrolled in a federal program when the student is dropped and/or if the student is assigned an 'F' grade.

## **What This Means to You**

It is critically important for online instructors to have frequent activities such as discussions, assignments, quizzes, and activities that can track students' engagement with online instruction. Missing these activities deems them inactive in the course, regardless of how many times they've logged into the system. Then instructors must strictly enforce a policy that requires students to complete activities in the course in order for them to retain access.



# Accessibility

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All faculty, whether they teach online or on campus, are required to meet the State and Federal requirements for ensuring accessibility of all course offerings. In 2011, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office produced a set of [Distance Education Guidelines](#), with the latest opinions and advice for us to follow.

All courses must be accessible **regardless of whether or not a disabled student is currently enrolled**. Accessibility is always a priority when designing and delivering a class, but it's especially relevant in the following areas of the online classroom:

- Course materials (files, links, videos, images, etc.) must be accessible to students with disabilities. This means that audio files must be transcribed, videos must be captioned, and text and image content must be accessible to students using assistive technology.
- If third-party websites are used as required course materials and you cannot guarantee accessibility of the content, you must be prepared to provide accessible equivalent versions of the content for students with disabilities.
- LAP students who need more time to take their online tests must be accommodated. [Learning Assistance at AHC](#). Also contact

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## Accessibility FAQs

Here are 10 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers regarding accessibility in Distance Education from the CCC Chancellor's Office Distance Education Guidelines. You can access the full report at: [http://www.htctu.net/dlguidelines/dlg\\_index.html](http://www.htctu.net/dlguidelines/dlg_index.html)

### 1. Do I really have to make my course accessible?

Yes. The California Community Colleges are bound by Federal law (Section 508) and California state law (Government Code Section 11135, that mirrors Section 508), to ensure that all DE courses be made accessible to students with disabilities. Following the Section 508 standards and the principles of Universal Design that are included in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 is the recommended approach to use in achieving accessibility.

**2. I have a video I want to use in my distance education course that is not captioned, but I don't know of any deaf students currently enrolled in my course. Do I still have to caption the video?**

Per Section 508 guidelines, video files should always be captioned whenever possible, and in most situations they MUST be captioned. Generally speaking, if the video has audio and it will be stored for later or repeated use in a course, it must be captioned. It does not matter if the video is instructor or institution owned, or if it is a collection of clips and snippets. In order to use non-captioned video, the video must be contained in a secure, password-protected environment, there must be no students requiring captioning, and the video can only be used for a single term. Other exclusions to captioning include student work and raw footage that will never be archived after the current use, as well as video with foreign language subtitles, and instructor-made videos that record feedback to an individual student who doesn't require captioning. Quite simply, if you're keeping the video and more than a very limited audience might view it, then you must caption it.

**3. How much time will it take to make my course accessible?**

There are several variables that affect this question. The quantity of multimedia you incorporate into your course can impact the amount of time required. In addition, the more complex the multimedia, the greater the time that can be expected to address accessibility. *The key is to build accessibility into your course content during the development phase, so it will not be necessary to go back later to retrofit inaccessible content.*

**4. If I do not have a student with disabilities, am I still required to caption my videos?**

Disabled students are not required to disclose their disabilities and, in an online course, it would likely be more difficult to identify disabilities than in a face-to-face course. All materials have to be accessible when presented, not in the after-the-fact accommodation style that is the norm in many face-to-face courses. Again, following the principle of Universal Design to make courses usable and effective for everyone benefits all students, not just students with disabilities.

**5. Where do I go for help?**

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**6. The files I upload into my course are mainly Microsoft Word, PowerPoint files, and also Adobe PDF files. Are those accessible?**

In general, not really. We strongly suggest having all content possible in Canvas. That helps to ensure accessibility. The accessibility of Word and PDF depends on the complexity of the layout of each document. In order to help ensure accessibility of Microsoft and Adobe files, a good starting point is the training materials that are available on the High Tech Center Training Unit (HTCTU) web site at <http://www.htctu.net>.

**7. I don't have time to caption or transcribe all of my videos and podcasts. How can I get help?**

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**8. My course is not a DE course. Do I still have to make my web materials accessible?**

Yes. Any content placed on the web must be accessible. For that matter, any online materials that you require students to access, whether you are using a campus-hosted learning management system, your campus faculty web page, or a site that you are maintaining outside the scope of the college altogether, all materials must be accessible to your students.

**9. I am an adjunct instructor. Am I required to make my course accessible?**

Yes, accessibility is a requirement for all faculty. In addition to your College's Access Technology Specialist, the High Tech Center Training Unit can provide assistance with specific accessibility issues or questions at: <http://www.htctu.net/>.

**10. What are the ramifications if my courses are not made accessible?**

If your online materials are not accessible, there is a chance that a student with a disability could file a discrimination complaint with the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. That would likely trigger an investigation. If the OCR found that the student's complaint was valid, your institution would likely have to agree to some binding conditions as part of a costly resolution. Another possibility would be that a student might file a lawsuit and the college or district could be held liable for any damages awarded to the student.

Looking for more detailed information about the accessibility of specific filetypes? Visit the [HTCTU Training Manual and Tutorials page](#) for access to several other tutorials on making your files accessible.

# Copyright

All courses, including online courses, must comply with Copyright Law. San Diego CCD has [a great resource for information and FAQs on copyright](#) as it pertains to your online courses. It includes a TEACH Act Checklist, a Fair Use Checklist, a Sample of Permission Letter, and a list of several frequently asked questions.

To comply with the [TEACH Act](#), the Canvas course template contains a Copyright Notice on the homepage: *The materials used in this course may be subject to copyright protection.* Please retain this notice on all your online and web-enhanced courses.

You will also want your online students to understand Copyright Law, particularly with regards to using images and text they find on the Internet. Material that is publicly available on the Internet and in digital form has the same copyright protections as content in non-digital form. Assume that material on the Internet is copyrighted. Check the site to see if the website author (of text, video, audio, images, etc.) has provided copyright information. Request permission to use the material if there is no statement that the material is freely available. To avoid plagiarism, properly cite the source of the information.

## From the AHC Catalogue:

Allan Hancock College complies with all federal regulations including the TEACH Act. Students and staff are prohibited from using the Allan Hancock College network to illegally download or share music, videos or other copyrighted materials. In accordance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) and Digital Millennium Copyright Act, college administrators may be obligated to provide to copyright holders and law enforcement officials information about AHC network users who have violated the law. There may be both civil and criminal penalties and fines for copyright violations.

# Publisher Materials

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Textbook publishers often have content packages available for instructors to load into Canvas course shells. These content packages contain presentation materials, videos, test questions, and other material that can be imported directly into a Canvas course shell.

Some publisher content, ebooks, and course activities are accessed by the student via the publisher's website for the course, sometimes requiring an additional fee. Instructors are responsible for ensuring that all publisher material to be used in their online class meets the requirements for:

1. **Accessibility** (per Section 508 standards) to students with vision and hearing disabilities, as described on an earlier page of this module.
2. **California Education Code Section 59400, Required Instructional Materials** was modified in January 2013 to eliminate the "tangible" requirement. A new section was added that impacts publisher materials through an access fee.

*Where instructional materials are available to a student temporarily through a license or access fee, the student shall be provided options at the time of purchase to maintain full access to the instructional materials for varying periods of time ranging from the length of the class up to at least two years. The terms of the license or access fee shall be provided to the student in a clear and understandable manner prior to purchase.*

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## Materials in online courses should be reviewed for quality every three years

Publisher materials used in online courses are changed and updated frequently as new technologies and products are developed. As a result, these materials need to be reviewed to ensure that they are of at least equal quality to the materials used in traditional face-to-face (F2F) courses. These materials should be reviewed in the course review at least every three years.

# Publisher Content nor Canvas LTIs are supported by the Distance Learning Department

Many if not most of the publishers of your textbooks have content you can add to your course, it may be a testbank or a total course content application that supports the entire textbook. Using aspects of this content can benefit your online or web-enhanced course. In most cases you contact your sales representative for this content. Usually they will give you a log in to their website where you can download this content. Because of the large number of publishers and different ways they allow access to their content, it is the responsibility of the instructor to work with the publisher to gain access and upload any content from the publisher. The Distance Learning Department cannot support publisher content.