New Federal Requirements for Distance Education: Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

Background Information:

The [US Department of Education](#) (DOE) has issued new regulations for distance education, effective on July 1, 2021. The new regulations specifically define "distance education" (as compared to "correspondence education"), "regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor(s) in a course", and "academic engagement". These new requirements apply to all distance education courses (synchronous and asynchronous) for which students may use Title IV funds (Federal financial aid).

Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between students and instructors is the key element that distinguishes distance education from correspondence education. This distinction is very important because correspondence courses are not typically eligible for Federal financial aid. To be eligible for financial aid, all distance education courses must follow the new definitions for RSI and monitored academic engagement. The relevant definitions are explained below, along with recommendations for building RSI and academic engagement into course design.

Correspondence course: (1) A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructors. Interaction between instructors and students in a correspondence course is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. (2) If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, the Secretary considers the course interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously. (2) The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include -
(i) The internet; (ii) One-way and two-

Definition of Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI):

In the new regulations for "regular and substantive interaction" in distance education, "regular" is defined as taking place on a "predictable and scheduled basis" throughout the course, and "substantive" means students are engaged in a course through teaching, learning, and assessments as well as at least two of these five activities:

1. providing direct instruction.

2. assessing or providing feedback on a student's course work.

instructor
- Instructor announcements to the class regarding course content and upcoming assignments.
- Synchronous online meetings and chats that further explore course material and answer student questions.
- Provide an overview video to accompany recorded lectures.

- Identify students struggling to reach mastery through observation of discussion activity, assessment completion, or even user activity and offer additional oprdeds.4 (no)14.1 (l)

discussion activity, assessment completion, or even user activity and offer additional opportunities for interaction.

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(iv) Participating in an interactive tutorial, webinar, or other interactive computer- assisted instruction.

(v) Participating in a study group, group project, or an online discussion that is assigned by the institution; or

(vi) Interacting with an instructor about academic matters; and

(3)   Does not include:

(i) Living in institutional housing;

(ii) Participating in the institution's meal plan;

(iii) Logging into an online class or tutorial without any further participation; or

(iv) Participating in academic counseling or advisement.

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Example RSI scale:

Since there are no quantitative requirements for RSI in your course, a scale developed and borrowed from SUNY helps faculty self-assess their own course and be flexible and creative in the course design and delivery.
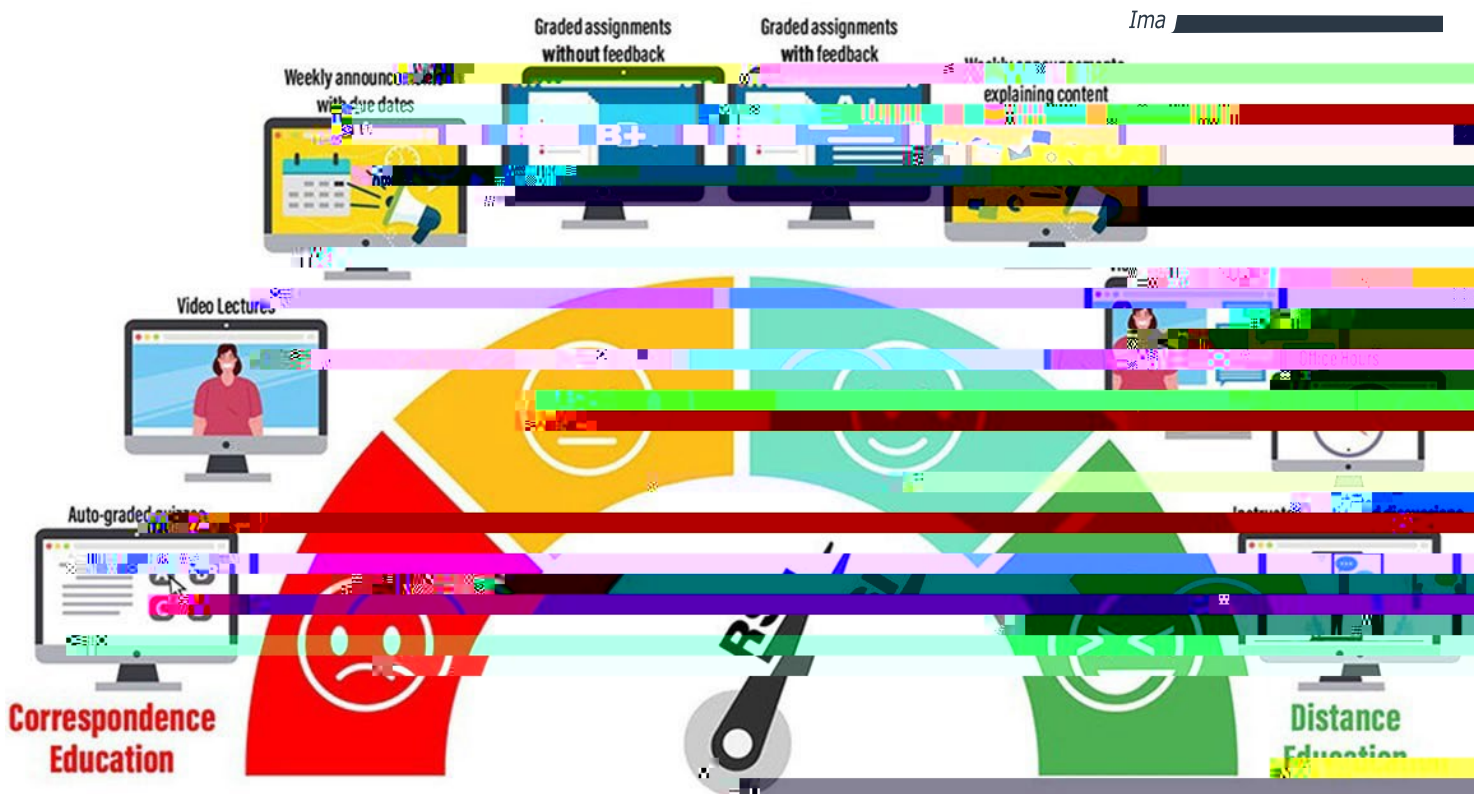
Checklist for Your Course:

Faculty Interaction	In my course	Tools I can/or have used
Regular interactions:		
Threaded discussion forums with regular and appropriate instructor participation based on course topics addressed to all students and/or to individuals publicly.		Discussion forums
Regular "Announcements" posted in the class.		LMS Announcement
Regular deadlines, distributed throughout the term of the course, for assignments and other student participation.		Syllabus, calendar of due dates

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,

Regular participation by the instructor in discussion activities with students, perhaps to provide a summary, to correct errors of fact,

References: