Regular and Substantive Interaction Policy for Online Instruction (Interim Policy)

Academic Affairs – Curriculum and Programs

CWU Policy 501-22

Effective: March 2, 2026

Expiration Date: August 28, 2026

Policy Executive: Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Responsible Office/Unit: Academic Affairs Council

Policy Statement:

The primary purpose of this interim policy is to clarify guidelines that support faculty efforts in online classes. It affirms the institution's continued commitment to implementing and strengthening Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) through intentional instructional design and faculty outreach, and it acknowledges faculty-initiated efforts to support regular and substantive interaction regardless of student response. In doing so, CWU reinforces its focus on promoting student learning, belonging, and achievement while clearly valuing faculty engagement as a core instructional responsibility.

Applicability:

This policy applies to all instructors who teach asynchronous online classes.

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(1) Purpose

    A. Central Washington University is committed to providing students with high-quality online learning experiences. A cornerstone of this commitment is ensuring that students have consistent and meaningful opportunities for engagement with their instructors. Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is not only a compliance requirement, but also a best practice that promotes student success. Research shows that when instructors provide timely feedback, initiate opportunities for connection, and actively engage students with course content, students are more likely to stay motivated, persist in their studies, and achieve strong learning outcomes (Bawa, 2016; Jaggars & Community College Research Center, 2013). The University recognizes that meaningful instructor engagement is demonstrated through documented, proactive faculty efforts to facilitate RSI, even when individual students choose not to participate or respond.

    B. CWU fosters RSI in online courses in alignment with its broader commitment to learner engagement across all instructional modalities. The primary purpose of this interim policy is to clarify guidelines that support faculty efforts in online classes. It affirms the institution's

continued commitment to implementing and strengthening RSI through intentional instructional design and faculty outreach, and it acknowledges faculty-initiated efforts to support regular and substantive interaction regardless of student response. In doing so, CWU reinforces its focus on promoting student learning, belonging, and achievement while clearly valuing faculty engagement as a core instructional responsibility.

(2) Definitions

A. ***Regular Interaction:*** "Regular" interaction means that the instructor initiates and maintains ongoing communication with students at predictable and consistent points during an online, asynchronous course. Interaction must not be left solely to student initiation.

  1. Examples of regularity include:

     a. Weekly announcements.

     b. Scheduled feedback on assignments.

     c. Structured discussion activities.

     d. Synchronous sessions.

B. ***Substantive Interaction:*** "Substantive" interaction refers to academic engagement that is directly tied to student learning and course outcomes. It requires the instructor to apply their expertise to support student learning, provide guidance, and promote achievement of course objectives.

  1. Substantive interaction in online courses involves at least two of the following activities:

     a. Providing direct instruction.

     b. Assessing or providing feedback on student work.

     c. Providing guidance about course content or competencies.

     d. Facilitating academic exchanges.

     e. Guiding students toward resources that improve mastery of course content.

(3) Activities That Contribute to RSI

A. The following activities count toward RSI when they are initiated by the instructor and connected to course outcomes:

  1. ***Direct Instruction:*** Delivering live (synchronous) lectures or facilitating online class sessions involving direct interaction between instructor and students.

2. ***Feedback:*** Providing individualized, constructive feedback on student assignments, projects, and exams.

3. ***Academic Discussions:*** Moderating discussion forums by asking probing questions, clarifying concepts, and synthesizing student contributions.

4. ***Content Support:*** Posting targeted clarifications, supplemental explanations, or worked examples to address common student misunderstandings, as well as responding to student emails and comments.

5. ***Student Conferences:*** Facilitating virtual one-on-one or group conferences with students (synchronous or asynchronous through structured communication channels) where substantive interaction occurs.

6. ***Assessment Guidance:*** Giving students direction on how to improve performance or how to approach future tasks.

7. ***Mentoring/Advising Within the Course:*** Guiding students in applying concepts to projects, research, or field-based assignments.

(4) Activities That Do Not Count Toward RSI

A. The following activities do not constitute RSI on their own, as they do not involve regular and substantive interaction initiated by the instructor:

1. Posting pre-recorded lectures or instructional videos without providing subsequent opportunities for student interaction.

2. Automated or computer-generated feedback that is not customized or instructor mediated.

3. Monitoring student progress only through the use of analytics or attendance tools.

4. Instructor presence that is limited to grading without substantive feedback.

5. Student-to-student interactions in discussion forums or group work without instructor engagement (while peer-to-peer interaction is an effective component of online learning, it does not count towards RSI for the purpose of this policy when it does not involve direct interaction with the instructor).

6. Administrative communications (e.g., reminders about deadlines, policies, or technical support).

(5) Implementation and Responsibilities

A. Instructors of online courses are accountable for designing and facilitating activities and/or communication that provide regular and substantive interaction.

B. The syllabus should include and describe course activities through which regular and substantive interaction can occur.

C. Faculty performance evaluations should account for RSI standards through a review of such things as syllabi, course designs, peer observations, and faculty development activities.

D. Multimodal Learning (MML) will provide training and guidance to help instructors design and deliver online learning activities that promote regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between faculty and students.

(6) References

A. Bawa, P. (2016). Retention in online courses: Exploring issues and solutions—a literature review. SAGE Open, 1-11.

B. Jaggars, S. S., & CCRC (Community College Research Center). (2013). Creating an effective online instructor presence. Teachers College, Columbia University.

History:
3/2/2026 Interim Policy, Approved; A. James Wohlpart, President