
Provost Message - Regular and Substantive Interaction

UAA Provost <uaa_provost@alaska.edu>
To: uaa_faculty_DL@lists.uaa.alaska.edu, uaa_staff_dl@lists.uaa.alaska.edu

Fri, Sep 9, 2022 at 10:35 AM



September 9, 2022

Dear UAA Faculty,

I want to once again acknowledge that tremendous effort has gone into the shift to online teaching and learning during these last two years. Even so, both students and faculty have reported that achieving authentic, meaningful connection has been a challenge. UAA is not alone in this: meaningful engagement and connection is so important that it's not only a best practice, it is something that is addressed in [regulation](#) by the federal Department of Education.

Practical Training Courses: In my August 15 message to you, I included information about new VA requirements for Practical Training Courses such as internships, practica, field study, and clinicals. In order for students to use VA benefits for these courses, there must be weekly communication between the instructor and the student. This communication can be by way of a meeting, but it can also be asynchronous, as long as it is initiated by the instructor and invites some form of two-way communication between the instructor and student.

Online Courses: For online courses, this expectation for meaningful faculty-to-student communication and engagement is *expanded*. The U.S. Department of Education requires that all online courses for which students may use Title IV funds (federal financial aid) "ensure that there is regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors." The Department of Education has the authority to review distance learning offerings at colleges and universities that receive federal funds. Please see [CFR 34 602.2 Definitions - Distance Education](#).

UAA faculty take teaching and learning seriously. That is one of the reasons I was so excited to be chosen as your provost. However, while I am confident that UAA faculty individually engage in regular and substantive interaction, UAA does not have a common definition for this important expectation. In consultation with the Faculty Senate Executive Board and the appropriate Faculty Senate committees, I will be working with faculty to develop a formal policy this academic year. For now, please use the below guidance for all asynchronous or hybrid courses:

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is:

1) Initiated by the instructor;

This differentiates distance education courses from correspondence courses, where students are responsible for initiating contact.

Examples include but are not limited to: individualized emails, instructor-led or -facilitated discussions, scheduled, and required virtual appointments, personalized feedback on assignments.

2) Frequent and consistent, no less than weekly;

Interactions with students should be frequently and consistently repeated throughout the semester.

Examples: weekly course announcements that are written specifically for the course, weekly summaries or highlights of discussion posts or a current assignment, or a regularly scheduled online review or help session.

3) Academic in nature and focused on the course subject.

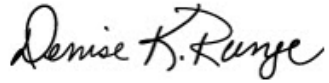
Routine, procedural interactions like reminders about upcoming deadlines or posting grades are not considered 'substantive' in terms of RSI unless they are accompanied by personalized feedback or

suggestions for improvement. To meet RSI considerations, the interactions should be connected to the subject of the course and contribute to the students' progress toward course, program, and college learning outcomes.

Examples: preview or review of difficult content, offering announcements that preview concepts introduced in the next unit, or listing questions for students to have in mind as they complete the next reading or assignment.

Thank you for your attention to this very important federal requirement. I realize this all seems intuitive, but UAA does need to be able to demonstrate these interactions for every distance course.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise K. Runge". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Denise Runge, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs