# Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

Spring 2024

# RSI Overview

- As of September 1, 2023, new regulations updated the definitions of distance and correspondence education to provide more clarity on the differences between these two modes of course delivery.

- In order to meet the Department of Education and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) definitions of Distance Education, courses must ensure regular and substantive Interaction (RSI) between students and instructors.

- If a course or program does not meet RSI, the course/program would be considered correspondence education, and students would not be eligible to receive Title IV funds (federal financial aid) for the course and/or program.

# Correspondence Education

- A correspondence education course is defined as, " 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, not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the students... A correspondence education course is not distance education"

- Correspondence courses are typically self-paced with little to no interaction initiated by the instructor.

HLC Glossary

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# Distance Education Definition

- According to the Higher Learning Commission, distance education is "Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously."

- Technologies may include
  - The internet;
  - One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices;
  - Audio conference; or
  - Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in items 1–3 above.

HLC Glossary

# Distance Education Course and Programs

## Program

- A certificate or degree program in which 50% or more of the courses may be taken as distance education courses.

## Course

- A course in which at least 75% of the instruction and interaction occurs using one or more of the technologies listed in the definition of distance education, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other

HLC Glossary

# Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

- While at first glance this federal requirement may appear as a burden, RSI is the foundation of effective online teaching.

- For interactions to be considered RSI, they need to meet the following criteria
  - Interactions must be initiated by the instructor
  - Interactions should be regular, scheduled and predictable, AND
  - Interactions must be substantive (focused on the course subject)

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# Instructor Initiated Interaction

- Instructor's should expect to take an active part in initiation and guiding interactions with students throughout the semester.

- Interactions should be an integral part of the instructional plan for the course

- Interactions should not be left up to student's optional discretion
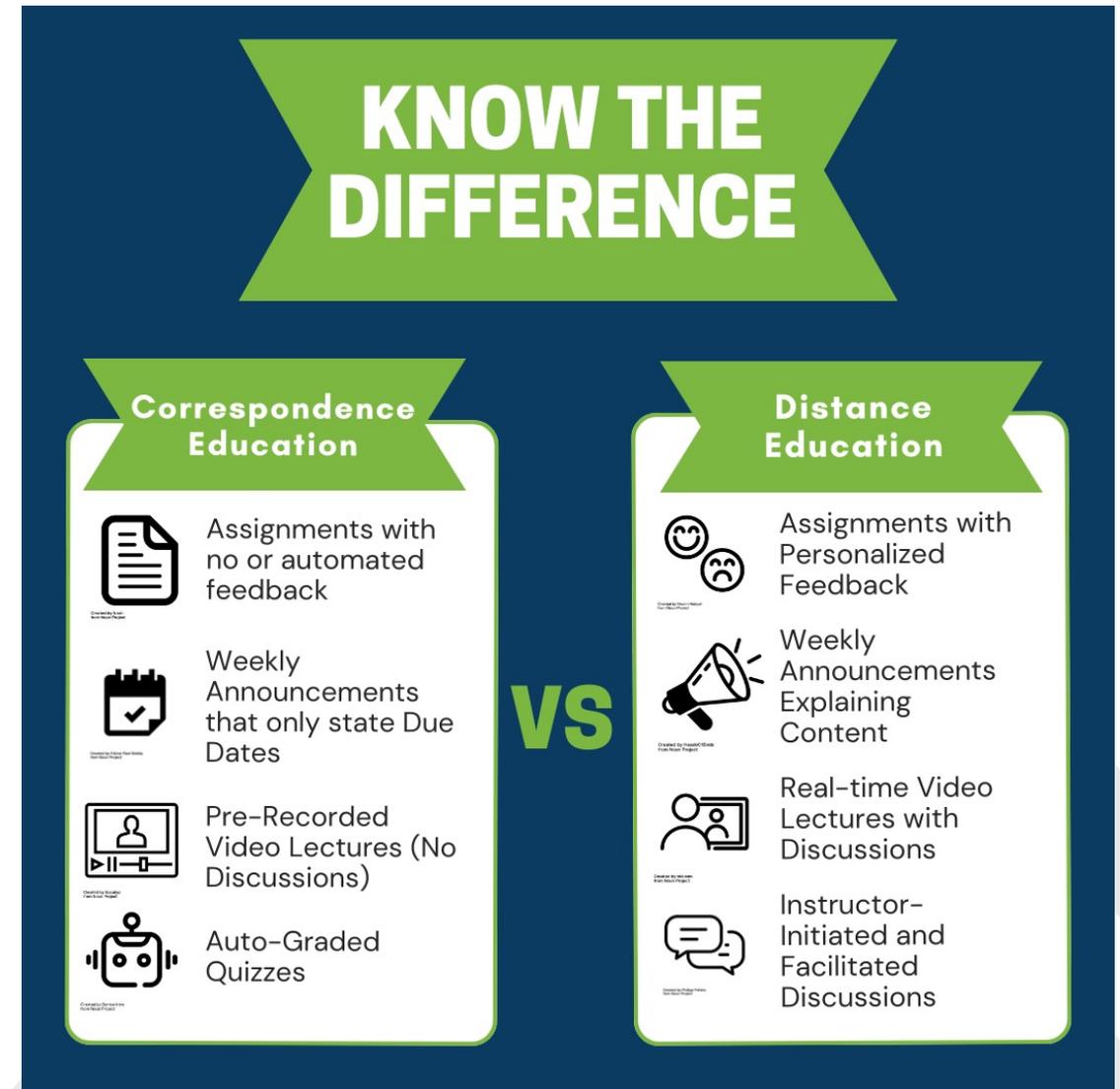
# Regular Interaction

- Interactions with students should be frequent and consistent throughout the semester. As a good rule of thumb, instructors should expect to interact with their students at least once per week, if not multiple times per week.

- Course materials should describe the frequency of interaction students should expect from the instructor, including how best to communicate with the instructor, when feedback will be available, and the timeline students should expect to receive a response from their emails.

HLC Glossary

# Substantive Interaction

- Interactions should be related to the subject of the course and contribute to student's progress toward the course, program, and learning objectives.
- Must include at least 2 of the following:
  - Providing direct instruction **(synchronous courses only)**
  - Assessing or providing personalized feedback on a student's coursework
  - Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency
  - Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency **(Interact in the discussion beyond posting initial instructions for students)**
  - Other instructional activities approved by the institutional or programmatic accrediting agency

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# Examples of RSI

- Personalized feedback on assignments or quizzes
- Instructor-facilitated discussions
- Video Lectures with discussions on the topics and issues raised in the videos
- Individualized emails on student progress
- Weekly course announcements with previews or reviews of difficult course content
- Weekly summaries or highlights of discussion posts
- Regularly scheduled online review or help sessions
- Lists of questions for students to have in mind when reading the textbook chapters

## KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

### Correspondence Education

- Assignments with no or automated feedback
- Weekly Announcements that only state Due Dates
- Pre-Recorded Video Lectures (No Discussions)
- Auto-Graded Quizzes

**VS**

### Distance Education

- Assignments with Personalized Feedback
- Weekly Announcements Explaining Content
- Real-time Video Lectures with Discussions
- Instructor-Initiated and Facilitated Discussions

**Caption:** Distance education includes assignments with personalized feedback, weekly announcements explaining content, real time video lectures, and instructor facilitated discussions. Correspondence education includes assignments or quizzes with automated feedback, weekly announcements that only state due dates, and pre-recorded video lectures with no discussion about the topics presented in the lectures.

# References

- Higher Learning Commission. (n.d.). *Glossary of HLC Terminology*. https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html