Guidelines for Regular and Substantive Interactions

UMKC's Interpretation of Regular and Substantive Interactions:

Regular and substantive interactions represent the frequency and type of activities within an online class that allow participants to exchange knowledge, information, concepts and ideas in a manner that promotes thoughtful learning through active engagement with people, content and resources. UMKC recognizes a number of elements associated with regular and substantive interactions:

- Synchronous interactions that support the direct and real-time interactions between individuals.
- Asynchronous interactions that support the indirect interactions between individuals.
- Student-to-student initiated or led interactions
- Student interaction with course-related content
- Faculty initiated or led interactions

Regular interactions are dictated by the learning activity within the course and may vary in frequency throughout the course. These types of interactions can fall into a number of overlapping categories:

- Weekly course summaries describing the upcoming weeks activities or summarizing the previous weeks results.
- Course logistics such as reminders or other types of communications such as statements of policies, change of dates or general course announcements.
- Feedback and Assessment related to completion of assignments.

Substantive interactions are those that promote active learning and thoughtful reflection and that provide opportunities to expand understanding and knowledge.

The following tables provide some examples of interaction types, potential tools, activity examples, and modality. This table is not considered an exhaustive list; instead, it serves as a reference point for faculty in considering their individual course design as it relates to subject matter, course size, learning outcomes and objectives, assessment strategies, and individual teaching styles. Course design should include all three interaction types. The table reflects tools available in a typical Learning Management System (LMS).

Interaction Type	Tool Type	Interaction/activity examples
Faculty-Student	1. Email to students 2. Announcements 3. VoiceThread 4. Discussion Boards 5. Journal Entries 6. Assignments (papers, reports, projects, etc.) 7. Panopto 8. Zoom 9. Phone 10. Gradebook	1. Responding to student emails about course content. (Asynchronous modality) 2. Summarizing the results or insights from the previous weeks activities and describing the coming weeks activities, expectations and deadlines. (Asynchronous modality) 3. Posting an initial prompt and/or example for students to model. Encouraging further discussion by asking students to clarify or elaborate on responses. (Asynchronous modality) 4. Monitoring and moderating the discussion forums. A moderator does not respond to all postings in a forum. Rather, a moderator helps guide the discussions based on selected responses or responses to the entire group. (Asynchronous modality) 5. Providing feedback regarding what a student does well in addition for pointing out specific areas for improvement, clarification, or deeper critical thinking. (Asynchronous modality) 6. Providing feedback regarding what a student does well in addition for pointing out specific areas for improvement, clarification, or deeper critical thinking. (Asynchronous modality) 7. Providing faculty introduction, course overview/navigation, and lecture videos. (Asynchronous modality) 8. Providing opportunities for students to communicate directly with faculty at defined times during a week. A best practice would be to hold office hours using Zoom and to record the sessions if appropriate to be watched by students unable to attend. For example, questions being asked in preparation for a test or an assignment. (Asynchronous modality) 9. Providing opportunities for students to communicate directly with faculty via phone (Synchronous modality) 10. Including thoughtful feedback on various assessments that prompt the student to reflect and expand his or her knowledge. Feedback should promote additional critical thinking and suggest opportunities for improvement as well as identify what a student has done successfully. (Asynchronous modality)
Student-Student	1. Blog posts 2. Discussion Boards 3. Wikis 4. Group Projects 5. VoiceThread 6. Zoom	1. Initial posts and responses to peers (Asynchronous modality) 2. Initial posts and responses to peers (Asynchronous modality) 3. Initial posts and responses to peers (Asynchronous modality) 4. Collaborative work toward end goal of the project (Synchronous or Asynchronous modality) 5. Presentations and comments, introductions (Asynchronous modality) 6. Group meetings, study sessions, live lectures (Asynchronous modality) For any assessment, faculty should provide students with a rubric or an expectation of work submitted.

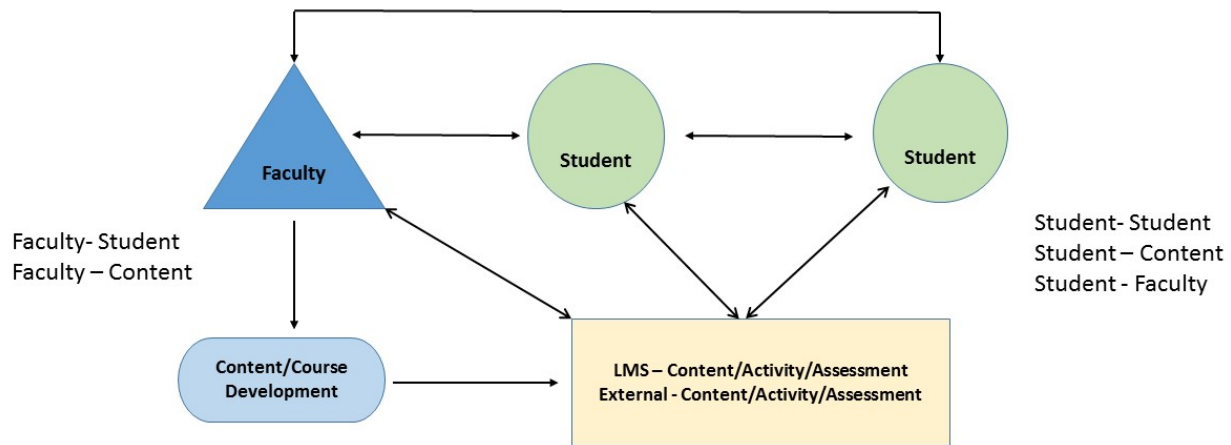| Student-Content	1. Textbook, articles, written content on LMS 2. Video/audio content (lectures, supplementary videos) 3. Labs 4. Research for labs, papers, projects, etc. 5. Quizzes, tests, surveys 6. Assignments 7. Discussion Boards	1. Reading assigned content either from textbooks, articles, content on the LMS, etc. (Asynchronous modality) 2. Watching/listening to video or audio content including instructor-produced lectures, podcasts, supplementary videos, etc. (Either, depending upon the requirements of the instructor) 3. Preparing for and participating in labs. (Either, depending upon the requirements of the instructor) 4. Conducting supplementary research in preparation for labs, papers, projects, presentations, etc. (Asynchronous modality) 5. Completing quizzes, tests, or surveys tied to course content. (Either, depending upon the requirements of the instructor) 6. Completing assignments tied to course content. (Asynchronous modality) 7. Responding to discussion board prompts related to course content. (Asynchronous modality)

For online certification, it is required that an instructor state in the syllabus or course policies his/her response time to student emails and questions, and his/her feedback response time on graded assessments. While UMKC does not dictate specific parameters regarding "regular interactions" and/or timely responses, the following table provides examples of best practices toward regular interactions and timely responses based on the Quality Matters rubric and the Online Learning Consortium scorecard.

Interaction/Tool	Best Practice
Interaction/Tool	Best Practice
Email	24 – 48 hour response time
Q & A discussion forum	24 – 48 hour response time
Announcements	1 per week
Assignment feedback (e.g. papers, projects, journals, blogs, etc.)	1 week from due date (notify students if there is a delay from the feedback response time indicated in the course syllabus)
Presentation feedback	48 hour feedback response time if synchronous presentation 1 week from due date feedback response time if asynchronous presentation

Regular and Substantive Interaction Types

Framework for Interaction Types

Faculty- Student
Faculty – Content

Faculty

Student

Student

Student- Student
Student – Content
Student - Faculty

Content/Course Development

LMS – Content/Activity/Assessment
External - Content/Activity/Assessment

Background

Regular and Substantive Interactions, the U.S. Department of Education, the Higher Learning Commission and UMKC: The Accreditation Dance of Online Courses. (UMKC Online Blog Post:https://online.umkc.edu/regular-and-substantive-interactions-the-accreditation-dance-of-online-courses/)

"The Department (USDOE) urges UMKC to enforce standards of substantive interaction institution- wide in its distance education courses. Additionally, UMKC should ensure compliance with the Program Integrity Regulations (75 FR 66832), published in the Federal Register on October 29, 2010, some of which specifically impact institutions offering distance education courses." [Letter to UMKC from the U.S. Department of Education Dated November 2, 2016]

As a result of the United States' Department of Education's (USDOE) recent review, UMKC must improve the design and delivery of its online courses or potentially face some very significant consequences when the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) re-accreditation visit occurs in 2019.

In the 2016 fall term, the USDOE notified UMKC that it would be doing a site visit to review the institution relative to its eligibility for federal financial aid. This included a review of its online programs and courses. The USDOE requested and received a list of all online courses taught at UMKC and selected ten to review. Online course reviewers can review all course materials, videos, activities, assignments, activity logs, and see how frequently students or instructors log into a course, how much time they spend on various activities and what the levels of interactions are occurring within the course. Of the ten courses reviewed, <u>four</u> (40%) failed to meet the federal standards of having regular and substantive interactions between faculty and students and between students. If these findings are extrapolated out to all online courses taught in a typical semester, this would represent approximately 150-160 courses.

The USDOE found the following issues: instructors not logging into their courses or logging into courses for only a few minutes in a week; courses where instructors had recorded their lecturers (some greater than ten or fifteen years ago) and students taking automatically graded quizzes based on those lectures; courses with absolutely no opportunity for interactions, not even the ability for students to ask questions of the instructor or other students; no online office hours or ways to communicate with the instructor; among other infractions. The importance of best practices surrounding regular and substantive interactions is based on sound educational research conducted over many years (with references). In addition, these best practices are reflected in the C-RAC Guidelines, the HLC 9 standards, NC-SARA guidelines, Quality Matters (QM) standards, and the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) scorecard.

There are strategies to help ensure UMKC meets the national standards in time for its 2019 Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit, including the following:

- Requiring faculty complete the certification training offered free of charge by UMKC Online.
- Requiring online courses be certified.
- Implementing a departmental review of all online courses.
- Encouraging faculty attend the OLC or QM training. These are online training programs paid for by UMKC Online.
- Encouraging faculty to attend the FaCET/UMKC Online faculty conferences on learning in the fall and winter.
- Conducting regular evaluations of the instructors and courses.
- Working with the UMKC Online instructional designers on the development and improvement of an online course. UMKC Online services are free.