



and individual students or between the instructor and small groups of students that the instructor has created for special projects or discussions. Peer reviewers who have such limited access may draw false conclusions about the extent of regular and substantive interactions.

- Inconsistency in the basis of evaluation

interaction. However, when peer review visits are conducted toward the beginning of a semester or quarter, regular interactions may not yet be in evidence.

Therefore, the ACCJC has devised the following guidelines to enhance the consistency of evaluating distance education.

Guidelines for Evaluating Distance Education

The guidelines below are suggested activities intended to promote consistency (1) in the way that institutions prepare for the peer review team, and (2) in the way that peer review teams observe distance education, especially online classes.

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- The peer reviewers should observe no fewer than 15 separate fully online distance education sections but no more than 10% of the total number of online sections offered in a semester.
 - If the college provides access to archived online sections from the semester or quarter immediately preceding the visit, then the assigned team members will be able to conduct their observations of the courses as part of the desk review of the evidence prior to the actual visit. The reviewers will not need to spend time observing online classes during the visit. This is a preferred approach to online classroom observation.
 - Peer reviewers should be allowed access as an instructor or teaching assistant so that they will be able to observe all facets of instructor interactions with students. Considering the sensitive nature of such observations and acting in accordance with the Commission Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process, the peer reviewers will maintain confidentiality throughout the observations and report writing.
 - Peer reviewers should evaluate the courses using the institution's own definitions and expectations for regular and substantive interaction. This includes observations of hybrid sections and sections taught using interactive video.
 - Peer reviewers should triangulate their findings by confirming their observations through interviews with faculty and students who participate in distance education, and with managers or administrators who oversee distance education, and by using those interviews to uncover the root of deficiencies that they may have found in their observations.
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In sum, crafting recommendations related to distance education, whether for compliance or for improvement, is not driven only by a low percentage of online classes with evidence of regular and substantive interaction. In its interviews with members of the college community, including faculty, students, and administrators, the team will want to explore the roots of the low percentage. If less than half of a college's online classes demonstrate regular and substantive interaction, chances are that the institution is experiencing challenges with one or more of the following: publishing or implementing policies and procedures related to distance education, ensuring professional development opportunities for online instructors, establishing accountability measures to monitor and ensure regular and substantive interaction, or embracing adjunct instructors in professional development and course development opportunities. The team will want to document the challenges carefully in its findings and then write recommendations appropriate to the severity of the deficiencies. Then, in the final Team Report, the team must ensure that its responses to the checklist questions pertaining to the Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education are consistent with its findings and recommendations in the body of the report.