

Online Engagement Guidelines

Faculty are experts and mentors in online courses rather than facilitators, so their presence and engagement are critical to each online course. As such, the online guidelines committee has sought to establish some expectations of what faculty presence and engagement should and could look like in online courses at SLCC.

The minimum guidelines for engagement in an online course at Salt Lake Community College are as follows:

- Interactions with students will be initiated by faculty at least once per week
- Faculty will utilize and initiate a variety of interactions throughout the course, rather than a single method (such as an interactive announcement each week).
- Interactions will be conducted within Canvas (the learning management system or LMS)
- An engagement plan will be included in the syllabus management system documenting how faculty will interact with students each week. Examples of such engagement are listed below but are not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive.

Examples of Weekly Interaction and Engagement:

- **Discussion boards.** Posting in a discussion lets the students know that you are present in the course, that you care about their learning, and are reading their posts. As one instructor says, "When you teach in the classroom, you talk; when you teach online, you participate in threaded discussions. If an instructor is not participating in the threaded discussions, the course becomes a correspondence event rather than an online learning experience" (Mandernach, Gonzales, & Garrett, 2006).
- **Interactive Announcements.** Announcements by themselves do not represent a moment of interaction, but there are clever ways to turn a simple announcement into a moment of engagement. For example, you may turn an announcement into a threaded discussion where students may post questions or responses to your suggestions or ideas. Alternatively, you could post about "real world" events that show a bit about who you are as a faculty member and ask students to share their own perspective from outside the class. Some faculty members also post easter eggs in their announcements, which guide students to unexpected parts of the course (and then ask students to find the hidden components) or to extra credit.
- **Q & A Sessions.** Hold an impromptu question and answer session with students synchronously or asynchronously. A threaded discussion at the end of a module asking students about a specific subject or their understanding of a process or concept can lead to powerful moments of interaction in our teaching. Adding points to the session also offers students incentive to discover how much they can learn from their faculty—even in moments where they have a strong understanding of the material.
- **Small Groups.** Weekly, the instructor offers a time when multiple students can meet with the faculty member to ask questions, get clarifications, and talk about course content and assessments. The strength of this addition to a course is a) students can see and talk to the

instructor in real time; b) it can help students make connections to other students in a non-scripted setting; c) the scheduling on different days at different times provides students the opportunity to find a time that works with their own personal schedules.

- **Surveys.** Surveys in Canvas allow faculty to ask specific questions regarding learning outcomes, points of clarification, or comments about the course. Some faculty find it helpful to post an announcement or video response to the anonymous student surveys, which can aid in comprehension, clarity, and reorient the student experience within the course.
- **Grading with individualized and specific comments for each student.** Giving feedback on assignments is also an interaction with students. When grading assignments to meet this requirement, the comments should be specific to each student and substantive. Perfunctory, formulaic, or automated responses to assignments would not be an example of regular or substantive interaction.
- **Direct Instruction.** Direct instruction is defined as meeting with students synchronously in a distance education class through videoconferencing technology. As students often take online courses, so that they do not need to meet at specific times or have a regular schedule, this method meets the Department of Education definition but should be seen as an optional requirement in fully online courses. If regular and scheduled times for direct instruction are required for the course, this may be seen as a livestream or hybrid teaching modality and should be listed as such for students in the catalog.

Engagement Plan Requirement:

- Faculty will include an engagement plan within their Canvas courses. As mentioned above, an engagement plan should establish specific details on how regular and substantive engagement will occur in this specific course. An example template for this engagement plan is available at the end of this document and can be included in future Canvas courses. The template for this engagement plan is available in the syllabus management system.
 - As the examples of online interaction vary for each discipline and department, the online guidelines hope to inspire and encourage creativity in meeting the regular and substantive engagement requirements. And rather than requiring specific or set forms of interaction, the guidelines instead require an engagement plan set by the department or faculty outlining specific methods of interaction within the course. This requirement also makes the RSIs measurable within the course, as students, faculty, peer-reviewers, or administrators can clearly see how the interactions will occur.



Engagement Plan for Online Classes

- **Set clear expectations on faculty response time:** *Clearly communicate the frequency and methods of communication and engagement that students can expect from you. For example:*
 - I will respond to email within [insert your timeline], and I will offer feedback on major assignments within [insert your timeline]. Please use the Canvas Inbox to contact me, as I will prioritize this email over other modes of communication.
- **Clarify the modes of engagement:** [This list should include a variety of interactions generated by the faculty member within Canvas.]
 - In this course I will be posting interactive announcements which will offer specific opportunities for class questions and extra credit every other week.
 - Additionally, I will be participating in the discussion forums with you to share my perspective within the discipline and to offer some nuances of interpretation that may not be present in your textbook.
 - Lastly, we'll be holding small group Q & A sessions, where we can learn from our peers (and faculty) on some of the more difficult units within the course.

Expectations for Student Participation

This list should include any preferences or course policies on how students should communicate with you or others within the course. The following are examples.

- **Discussion Boards:** Participation in the Discussion Boards counts toward your Participation Points. Your instructor and fellow students will read and comment on your posts so please follow the rules for online conduct. See the Section on Netiquette

below for more details. Your instructor will generally review and/or comment on Discussions at least once a week.

- **Add a Profile Picture or Avatar:** You will engage in many online interactions within Canvas during this class. Creating a distinctive online identity with a profile picture or avatar will help set you apart and create a distinctive virtual presence for your Canvas interactions. Follow these instructions to add your profile picture to your user account.
 - [How do I add a profile picture in my user account as a student?](#)
- **Canvas Inbox:** While there are many methods of email available, please use the Canvas Inbox first, as this will be our primary mode of communication throughout the course.