

Regulations and Guidelines: Distance Education

The Board of Governors' approval of distance education (DE) regulations for the California Community Colleges permits colleges to explore and develop educational initiatives using advanced communication and computing technologies to address student access issues related to geographical, cultural, economic, disability or facility barriers.

California Code of Regulations sections 55200 through 55210 specifically address distance education¹. Text of each code section, as approved in 2019, is presented here followed by the guideline for that section.

TITLE 5, SECTION 55200. DEFINITION AND APPLICATION

Distance education means instruction in which the instructor and student are separated by time and/or distance and interact through the assistance of technology. All distance education is subject to the general requirements of this chapter as well as the specific requirements of this article. In addition, instruction provided as distance education is subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12100 et seq.) and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794d).

Note: Authority cited: Sections 66700 and 70901, Education Code. Reference: Sections 70901 and 70902, Education Code; title 29 United States Code section 794d; and title 42 United States Code sections 12100, 12101, 12102, 12103, 12131, 12132, 12133 and 12134.

Guideline for Section 55200

Distance education encompasses any method of instruction in which the student and faculty are separated by time and/or distance. These methods include video, audio recordings, video conferencing, or other passive medium. No matter how the instruction is provided to students, all courses and instructional materials must be accessible.

With 95% of distance education offered via internet-based interaction in the California Community Colleges, three categories of “online” education have been defined:

- **Fully Online (FO):** all instruction, assessment and activities are online
- **Partially Online (PO):** online instruction with scheduled on-campus meetings and/or assessments
- **Online with Flexible In-person component (OFI):** online instruction with in-person/proctored assessment/activities at a flexible time and place

¹ Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 5. Education, Division 6. California Community Colleges, Chapter 6. Curriculum and Instruction, Subchapter 3. Alternative Instructional Methodologies, Article 1. Distance Education

Whenever an online, partially online or OFI section requires an activity that cannot be completed online or asynchronously, that requirement should be noted in the schedule of classes.

For clarity among CCC students who may enroll in multiple colleges, it is recommended that the CCCs adopt these categories of online education for use in their college catalogs and schedules of classes.

Note that these definitions are **not** the same as those used for internal accounting where the 51% rule is applied. See title 5, Section 58003.

Definitions of Online in Detail:

FULLY ONLINE (FO) (also known as “100% online”) – Instruction involving regular and effective online interaction that takes place synchronously or asynchronously and is supported by online materials and activities delivered through the college's learning management system, and through the use of other required materials. All approved instructional contact hours are delivered through these online interactions. Fully online classes do not require in-person assessments or activities. If synchronous online activities are required, the schedule of classes indicates dates and times.

PARTIALLY ONLINE (PO) (also known as “hybrid”) – Instruction involving regular and effective online interaction for -any portion of the approved contact hours that takes place synchronously or asynchronously and is supported by materials and activities delivered in person and online through the college's learning management system, and through the use of other required materials. Any portion of a class that is delivered online must follow a separate approval process. The approved online portion must meet the regular and effective contact regulation. The schedule of classes indicates dates, times and locations of the required in-person components.

ONLINE WITH FLEXIBLE IN-PERSON COMPONENT (OFI) – Instruction involving regular and effective online interaction that takes place synchronously or asynchronously and is supported by online materials and activities delivered through the college's learning management system, and through the use of other required materials. Approved instructional contact hours are delivered through online interactions, supplemented by required in-person assessments or activities that are available at approved locations during a specified range of time. The schedule of classes indicates dates, range of times and locations of all required in-person components.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN PARTIALLY ONLINE AND ONLINE WITH FLEXIBLE IN-PERSON COMPONENTS

A course section in which all approved contact hours and student interaction take place online and through required in-person pre-scheduled meetings at a time certain and place certain is a Partially Online section.

A course section in which all approved contact hours and student interaction take place online and through required in-person assessments or activities that are available at a

pre-approved location that may be chosen by the student during a specified range of times is an Online with Flexible In-Person Component section. Districts and colleges may decide what constitutes a reasonable range of time to provide flexibility needed to accommodate student schedules and support student success, but the recommendation is for a 7-day period during a full semester-length section. The key components are that 1) any required in-person assessments or activities take place at any pre-approved location the student may choose, (e.g. near home or work or at a remote college campus) and 2) that the assessment is available during a range of times rather than a specified time-certain, enabling a working student to choose a time and place that do not interrupt work schedules. For example, a student who lives in San Diego is enrolled in an OFI class in Sacramento which includes 4 required proctored assessments during the final week of each of the four months during the semester. The student takes instruction online and chooses a day during the final week of each month when the Proctoring Center at Mesa College in San Diego is available and takes the required assessment there.

Below are examples of course configurations and activities, and the categories under which they would fall. They are provided for clarity as examples, and are not meant to imply restrictions that course categories are restricted to these configurations only.

Example of FO	Examples of PO	Examples of OFI
Online instruction with all activities and exams delivered online.	Online instruction with required scheduled weekly meetings, or on-campus exams on scheduled days.	Online instruction with required in-person proctored exams at a proctoring location near the student and during a specified range of times. (e.g. Week of Oct. 7-13, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
Online instruction with activities delivered online, with required proctored online exams.	Online instruction with requirement to attend a specified museum at a specified time as part of instruction hours.	Online instruction with required museum tour as part of instructional hours that can be accomplished at a museum near the student during a specified range of time. (e.g. Any museum of fine art during the week of Oct. 7-13)
Online instruction with required lab activities that are conducted by students remotely without physical location requirements, but which may require use of lab	Required scheduled labs on a specified campus or location and/or at a specific time.	Online instruction with required lab at a collaborating college facility near the student during the college's open lab hours during a specified range of time. (E.g.

kits or other prescribed materials.		Week of Oct. 7-13, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
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On-campus instruction with technology-assisted delivery

Any course that requires access to internet-connected devices should specify in the schedule of classes. Sample schedule note:

This class is taught completely on campus with a technology-enhanced format that uses the Canvas learning management system for students to access the syllabus, assignments and quizzes. These items are not distributed in print, except where accommodations are needed through the campus disability services center. While lectures are delivered in class, lecture notes or slides and additional resources may be posted to the Canvas course site for access outside of class hours. Students will need a mobile or laptop device and internet connection to access these materials.

Accessibility

Included in title 5, section 55200 is the requirement for accessibility. Ensuring that distance education courses, materials and resources are accessible to students with disabilities is a shared institutional responsibility. Districts and colleges must provide the faculty, staff, and administrators, with appropriate resources and training to ensure their understanding and implementation of accessibility regulations as outlined in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12100 et seq.), Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. Sec. 794d), and California Government Code 11135. The accessibility requirements of Section 508 must be incorporated into the processes for development, procurement, maintenance, or use of information and communication technology by a community college district using any source of state funds.

In the professional development program for distance education faculty, college professional development programs should include a section or module on online course accessibility. Such training may include accepted best practices for electronic content accessibility and the principles of universal design for learning. Understanding these principles will allow faculty to include accessibility practices while they are creating online course materials.

The following general principles should be followed to ensure that distance education courses are accessible to students. They embody the general concepts of the law but do not provide a detailed legal analysis of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Persons using this document who are unfamiliar with the ADA, and Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act may wish to consult district legal counsel or the college ADA Coordinator or Disable Student Programs and Services Coordinator for additional information. The [2018 California Community Colleges Accessibility Standard](#) also provides additional important information.