Instructor-Initiated Interaction

To differentiate distance education courses from correspondence courses, where students are responsible for initiating contact, the interactions need to be started by the instructor. The instructor should expect to take an active part in initiating and guiding a range of interactions with the students throughout the semester. This ensures that interactions are not optional and left up to each student's individual discretion, rather, they are an integral part of the instructional plan for the course.

Examples: individualized emails, instructor-facilitated discussions, scheduled virtual office hours, personalized feedback on assignments

Regular, Scheduled, and Predictable Interactions

Interactions with students should be frequently and consistently repeated throughout the semester. This means that once a course begins, long intervals of time should not pass between the initial instructor interaction with students. The mode of interaction may vary throughout the course depending on the instructor aims and the needs of the students. But the regular flow of interactions should remain as consistent as possible. To be scheduled and predictable, course design materials should describe the expected frequency of interaction with the instructor, including times and dates of the virtual office hours if applicable, grading feedback, announcements, and potential email communication.

Examples: weekly course announcements written specifically for the course, weekly summaries or highlights of discussion posts, regularly scheduled online review or help sessions

Substantive Interactions

Interactions should be connected to the subject of the course and contribute to the students' progress toward course, program, and university learning objectives. Routine procedural interactions, such as reminders of upcoming deadlines or activities like assigning grades are not 'substantive' on their own unless they are accompanied by personalized feedback or suggestions for improvement. This does not mean that interactions designed to welcome students or build classroom community are not important, merely that they are not sufficient by themselves.

Examples: announcements previewing or reviewing difficult content, emails previewing concepts introduced in the next unit, and listing questions for students to have in mind when reading the textbook chapters