Accreditation/RSI Review of DE Courses

Frequently Asked Questions (2023)

The following is a list of frequently asked questions about the accreditation process. Where possible, the responses to these questions are taken directly from the "ACCJC Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review" (Appendix E) and the "ACCJC Policy on Distance and Correspondence Education," which offer the most comprehensive discussion of the accreditation process and the standards by which classes are evaluated. The material in this FAQ is not intended to replace the information in either of those documents.

When will accreditation begin and end? What is the timeline?

The accreditation review for College of the Sequoias will occur during the **Fall 2024 and Spring 2025** semesters.

What semester will be evaluated during the review process?

Courses "from the semester immediately preceding the semester of the comprehensive peer review" will be evaluated, which means that **courses from the Fall 2024 semester will be reviewed** by the accreditation team.

How do I know if my courses will be reviewed?

We don't. The team will pull fully-online courses at random, so it is important that everyone plans to be reviewed. The number of classes to be reviewed is based on the number of online courses offered by the college. According to the ACCJC, "This sample should constitute 5% (not to exceed a maximum of 50) of the total number of distance education sections that were offered during the semester immediately preceding the semester of the comprehensive peer review."

At what point in the semester will a course be selected and reviewed?

Courses will be selected at the conclusion of Fall 2024 "affording [the accreditation team] the opportunity to observe 'regular and substantive' interaction through a full semester, quarter, or shortened term." According to the ACCJC, using archived classes "also ensures that the reviewers' presence in the online class will not interfere with instruction or course design." In other words, faculty and students will *not* be active in the course during the review process and will not have any interaction with the reviewer.

Will I be notified that my course was selected for review?

Faculty will *not* be notified if their course has been selected for review unless there are issues identified with the course and the accreditation team needs a more guided walk-through of the content. According to the ACCJC Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process, "the college should expect that the peer review team will maintain confidentiality of student and instructor information."

How will the courses be chosen for review?

Fully-online courses will be selected randomly in a collaborative process with the review team. Hybrids are not to be reviewed. According to the ACCJC, "The college should work with the team chair and vice chair to provide a random sample of fully online distance education courses to observe."

What elements of a course will be available for access by a reviewer?

Reviewers will have access to all content that is archived in a Canvas shell, but all student names will be removed. This means that any interactions with students that occur in external tools will not be archived (and not visible) to reviewers. If you use external tools to interact with your students, make that clear in the Canvas course.

What are the standards of evaluation?

The standards for online classes come from both our college and from the ACCJC guidelines. According to the " ACCJC Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review" (Appendix E), "Peer reviewers should evaluate the courses using the institution's own definitions and expectations for regular and substantive interaction, ensuring the institution's definition includes at least two of the methods as defined in the Policy on Distance and Correspondence Education."

What is "regular and substantive interaction"?

Regular and substantive interaction is a phrase from federal regulations (Title 5) that the ACCJC defines in "ACCJC Policy on Distance and Correspondence Education":

"**Substantive Interaction** is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes *at least two* of the following:

    a) providing direct instruction;
    b) assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
    c) providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
    d) facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
    e) other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency."

"An institution ensures **regular interaction** between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency—

    a)   Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and

    b)   Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student."

How do I ensure I am doing "regular and substantive interaction"?

Submit your course to the COS RSI Review team. This is a confidential and friendly peer review to make sure we are all doing RSI and building it into our courses ahead of Fall 2024.

Attend the various workshops available on RSI between now and Fall 2024. See the Online Learning Resources page for dates, times, and links to join.

What if some of the regular and substantive interactions occur outside of Canvas (such as Turnitin, Discord, or G-Suite)?

We recommend that instructors **clearly signal to students (and thus potential reviewers) where and how those interactions are occurring**. This "signal" might take the form of an announcement, a comment in a Canvas discussion, or a comment on a graded Canvas assignment. For example, an instructor might post an announcement that tells students that Turnitin assignments have been graded and that, in addition to the grade and comments in the Canvas grade book, the instructor has provided comments on the Turnitin assignment as well as a rubric for review. The same principle would apply to office hours conducted via Zoom or some other external tool. **If the externally-facilitated activity is documented by the instructor in Canvas, the reviewers will "count" that interaction in their review.**

What if an online course being reviewed does not meet the standards?

One course will not make or break COS' accreditation. However, a maximum of 50 courses will be looked at, and reviewers will be paying close attention to patterns and trends. **The majority of the reviewed courses must meet the ACCJC standards.** According to the ACCJC, "Determining if a recommendation is necessary, and the type of recommendation, compliance or improvement, should be based on the careful consideration of several factors. For example, if less than half of the distance education classes observed demonstrated evidence of regular and substantive interaction, the team should explore through its interviews with members of the college community, including faculty, students, and administrators, and review of all evidence, the issues pertaining to the low percentage, before deciding if a recommendation is necessary and the type of recommendation."

Where can I find information about the changes made to Title 5?

The CCC Chancellor's Office has a page dedicated to pending regulatory changes, which lists the changes for 2022. The official PDF with changes to Title 5 can be found on that page under Distance Education.

What if I have other questions?

Email Distance Education Coordinator Elise Baker at eliseb@cos.edu. This FAQ is a compendium of questions both received and anticipated, but it may not include everything that you want to know. If you have additional questions, we can add them to the list and help others who may also want to know.