

From: [UHD Provost](#)
To: [UHD Provost](#)
Subject: Updated Policies for Online Courses and Syllabi
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FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Regular and Substantive Interaction

June 29, 2021

Dear Faculty,

As you plan for fall semester, we bring to your attention two items: specific requirements for engagement in online courses and an updated syllabus policy.

1. Requirements for Online Course Engagement

This is an update on our policy regarding the requirement that “faculty teaching in an online course section must have regular and substantive interactions with students throughout the term in compliance with Title IV requirements” from section 3.7.1 of PS 3.A.37 [Online Education Policy](#).

Specifically, the Department of Education has [new rules \(see fact sheet link for summary\)](#) which include specific interpretations for “regular and substantive interactions” (RSI) that each of our online courses must meet to ensure that the courses are financial aid eligible; the goal is to more clearly distinguish “distance education courses” from “correspondence courses” which do not have the DOE financial-aid eligibility options. We have also put together a [UHD RSI website](#) that provides more information regarding the new rules.

The deadline for compliance is July 1; while that is immediate, please know that these requirements appear to be consistent with best practices already in place among our faculty as per our own policy.

The primary requirements for RSI are as follows:

- Engagement must be faculty-initiated (e.g., individualized emails about progress, responses to discussions)
- Engagement must be regular, scheduled, and predictable (e.g., sending weekly announcements with reminders of upcoming work, announcing and holding regular office hours, providing discussion responses)
- Engagement must be substantive, focused on the course subject or content (e.g., offering reading questions for chapters; providing an instruction video to describe an assignment)

Given the compliance and consequential nature of these interpretations for UHD and for our students who are dependent on federal financial aid, we ask you to read and review the detailed information on our RSI website [[RSI | University of Houston-Downtown \(uhd.edu\)](#)] and employ specific strategies to ensure the required compliance in your courses—again, many of the strategies are already in place; we simply ask that you be very conscious of the ways in which their regularity and substance are visible to students.

We will continue to work with faculty on our efforts to establish formalized resources and processes to embed these requirements in our policies, course materials, and general best pedagogical practices. In particular, we want to identify specific methods by which faculty can demonstrate how we are meeting these engagement requirements in the event of an audit.

2. UHD Syllabus Policy Updated

The [UHD Syllabus Policy](#) has been revised and signed. We encourage you to review it!

The biggest change is the removal of specific required language regarding institutional policies—instead, the policy requires the Office of the Provost, in consultation with faculty leadership, to post shared syllabus language that addresses common requirements such as ADA, emergency continuity plans, recommended technology requirements, and academic honesty. The intent is to ensure that we have accurate and updated language each semester and if external regulations change, we can get them into all syllabi. This is similar to what we have done during COVID.

For this first implementation cycle of the new policy, we plan to create a syllabus resource page for faculty on the Academic Affairs website. Once we've worked with Senate leadership to confirm the language, we'll post and send a message to all faculty when the page is live and the language is available for use. You should be able to choose whether to cut and paste into your syllabus or to link to the page from your syllabus.

Office of the Provost