Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI) Evidence

Universities of Wisconsin Online Collaboratives & Flexible Option Programs

This list includes, but is not limited to, evidence that would indicate regular and substantive interactions (RSI) have occurred in distance education. Some programs, disciplines and course design approaches may have different evidence available that satisfies RSI – context matters. No single source of evidence will be sufficient for demonstrating RSI, rather RSI is evidenced by the pattern of instructional engagement and delivery that is intentional, ongoing, and advances learning.

Reviewer framing test (apply throughout):

Is interaction

- instructor-initiated,
- academically substantive, and
- occurring regularly across the term (not just at grading points)?

1. Course Design: Built-In RSI (Intent)

1.1 Instructor-Initiated Interaction is Designed

☐ Syllabus explicitly states expected instructor interaction cadence (announcements, feedback, outreach)

☐ Course schedule includes planned instructor touchpoints across weeks (not clustered)

☐ Assignments require interaction beyond content consumption (e.g., discussions, iterative submissions)

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Syllabus language • Weekly modules in Canvas • Assignment instructions	Course can be completed through readings/videos + auto-graded quizzes alone

1.2 Substantive Interaction Opportunities Are Embedded

☐ Activities require:

- ☐ Direct instruction (live, can be recorded for later access for some students)
- ☐ Guided discussion of content
- ☐ Feedback on student work
- ☐ Academic support tied to course concepts

☐ Interaction types align with federal RSI definitions (not just administrative contact)

Auditable Evidence Per Modality	Red Flag
• Asynchronous: discussion boards, video feedback, annotated comments, office hours • Synchronous: live sessions, office hours	Interaction limited to reminders, deadlines, or tech support

2. Instructional Delivery: Evidence RSI Occurred (Ongoing Execution)

2.1 Regularity Across the Term

☐ Instructor activity is distributed across weeks (not front-loaded or end-loaded)
☐ Students receive ongoing interaction, not just midterm/final feedback

Auditable Evidence (Canvas Analytics/time stamps)	Red Flag
• Announcement frequency over time • Grading timestamps • Discussion participation logs	Long gaps (e.g., 2+ weeks) with no instructor presence

2.2 Instructor Initiation (Critical Distinction)

☐ Instructor initiates:
- ☐ Discussions (not only responds)
- ☐ Outreach to inactive/struggling students
- ☐ Clarifications or mini-lectures based on student performance

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Announcement logs • Inbox/message logs • "Message students who…"	Interaction only occurs when students reach out first

3. Substantive Academic Engagement (Advances Learning)

3.1 Interaction is Content-Focused

☐ Instructor responses:
- ☐ Expand on concepts
- ☐ Correct misunderstandings
- ☐ Provide examples or alternative explanations

☐ Feedback references course learning outcomes or disciplinary standards

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Discussion replies • Assignment feedback comments • Video/audio feedback artifacts	Feedback is generic ("Good job," "Nice work") with no academic substance

3.2 Interaction Supports Learning Progression

☐ Evidence of:
- ☐ Iterative feedback (draft → revision)
- ☐ Scaffolded assignments with instructor input between stages

☐ Instructor adapts instruction based on observed student performance

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Versioned assignments • Rubric-based feedback • Announcements addressing common errors	No visible link between feedback and subsequent student improvement opportunities

4. Feedback & Assessment Loop (Advances Learning)

4.1 Timely and Ongoing Feedback

☐ Feedback provided at multiple points in the term (not just final grades)
☐ Timely feedback allows students to apply it to future work

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Gradebook timestamps • Inline comments • Audio/video feedback files	Bulk grading at end of term

4.2 Feedback is Substantive

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag

• Feedback includes:
  ○ Conceptual corrections
  ○ Skill development guidance
  ○ References to course material
	Auto-graded assessments dominate with no instructor follow-up

5. Student–Instructor Interaction Patterns (Ongoing Execution)

5.1 Bidirectional Engagement Exists

☐ Students respond to instructor prompts
☐ Instructor follows up on student responses (not one-and-done)

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Threaded discussions • Comment chains • Messaging exchanges	One-directional instructor announcements with no engagement and follow-up

5.2 Interaction is Inclusive of All Students

☐ Evidence instructor engages beyond a small subset of active students
☐ Outreach to low-performing and/or non-participating students

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Targeted messages • Participation reports	• Interaction concentrated on top performers only

6. Modality-Specific Indicators

6.1 Asynchronous Online (High Scrutiny Area)

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Frequent announcements tied to course content • Active facilitation of discussions (probing, redirecting) • Personalized feedback on assignments • Instructor-created video/audio explanations	“Set it and forget it” course shells

6.2 Synchronous / Hybrid

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Live session records or attendance logs • Evidence of interaction during sessions (chat, Q&A) • Follow-up materials or summaries	Lectures exist but no documented interaction

6.3 CBE (High Scrutiny – Especially Direct Assessment)

☐ Faculty/coaches provide content-related feedback, not just pacing support

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Academic intervention • Competency clarification	Coaching limited to motivation/time management only

7. Program-Level Assurance (HLC Lens)

7.1 Consistency Across Sections

☐ RSI expectations are defined at program or institutional level

☐ RSI expectations are applied across instructors

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Faculty guidelines • QA rubrics (e.g., internal standards) • Included in program reviews	Lack of evidence

7.2 Faculty Training & Oversight

☐ Faculty are trained on RSI expectations

☐ Courses are periodically reviewed for RSI compliance

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Training materials • Review reports • ID/OPLR documentation • Instructors' performance evaluations include review of RSI	Lack of evidence

7.3 Monitoring & Intervention

☐ Institution monitors:

- ☐ Instructor presence
- ☐ Student engagement metrics
- ☐ Semester review for each course prior to assigning course grade

☐ Interventions occur when RSI is weak

Auditable Evidence	Red Flag
• Dashboard reports • Escalation workflows	Lack of evidence

8. Disallowed Substitutions (Automatic Red Flags)

Reviewer should flag if RSI is being substituted with:

- ☐ Publisher courseware alone
- ☐ AI tools with no instructor mediation
- ☐ Auto-graded assessments only
- ☐ Peer interaction without instructor involvement

9. Final Reviewer Determination Heuristic

A course/program meets RSI if:

- ☐ Interaction is initiated by the instructor
- ☐ Interaction is academically substantive
- ☐ Interaction occurs regularly across the term
- ☐ Interaction is documented and auditable
- ☐ RSI is consistent across all courses in collaborative programs
- ☐ RSI occurs at the live section level and delivery artifact and not only part of the course shell design

If there's no pattern of instructor-initiated, predictable and substantive interactions, then RSI may be lacking.

Produced by the Office of Online & Professional Learning Resources as a resource for Universities of Wisconsin Online Collaboratives and Flexible Option Programs.

Department of Education, Code of Federal Regulations: Title 34 C.F.R. 600.2