

# TOPkit DIGEST

The content in this months TOPkit Digest is brought to you by a collaboration among **Josh Strigle**, M.Ed., Director, E-Learning and Learning Support Centers, College of Central Florida ([striglej@cf.edu](mailto:striglej@cf.edu)), **Jennifer Velloff**, M.Ed., Project Manager, Cisco Systems ([veloff@gmail.com](mailto:veloff@gmail.com)), and **Ana Lopez**, M.Ed., Online Learning Experience Designer, Colorado School of Mines ([aclopez@mines.edu](mailto:aclopez@mines.edu)). They discuss the topic of **Regular and Substantive Interaction for Preparing Faculty to Teach Online.**

## Contents of this Digest

- Video Tip: Planning for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)
- Top Tips: The Role of Instructional Designers in RSI
- Must-Read Announcements: Call for Contributions, Online CoLAB
- From the Community: Best Practices Surrounding RSI and Engagement
- Top Community Topics

## Video Tip

### Ana Lopez, Online Learning Experience Designer, Discusses Planning for RSI

Mines has a Robust Course Development and Faculty Mentoring Process, Much of which Ties Directly to RSI



An institution must intentionally plan for all vital components of an online course. Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) is no different. Effective institutions plan for robust interactions in the course development cycle, providing faculty with training, tools, and assistance. The process that Ana is a part of at Colorado School of Mines is an excellent example of providing faculty with everything they need to execute an effective RSI strategy.

[Watch Video](#)

### Must-Read Announcements

- We invite you to share a model, practice, or approach to faculty development. Your content contribution will be featured on the TOPkit website and promoted through social media. The [Call for Contributions](#) deadline is **April 15**.
- Meet new colleagues and get a glimpse into their current professional roles at the **TOPkit Online CoLAB Speed Networking** event on **June 28** at 3 PM EDT. **Save the date.**

### Top Tips

## The Role of Instructional Designers in RSI

Compliance and Best Practice Sometimes Do Go Hand-In-Hand

RSI has been a requirement for online instruction for some time now. It is part of the distinction between distance learning and correspondence courses and a determinant of eligibility for financial aid. This regulation has been historically vague, but recently, it was overhauled to establish a measurable

threshold for interaction. Institutions and regulators now have a well-defined interaction framework to work within. As designers, you are well positioned to assist faculty in building these practices into their courses for the benefit of students and the protection of the institution. You also likely sit between administrators who seem overly obsessed with the regulation and the faculty who are dismissive or intimidated. You can promote the student success benefits of the required interactions with faculty and that the new regulation is a positive and clarifying change for all involved. This regulation should inspire thoughtful action but not anxiety.

## Read the Federal Register : Distance Education and Innovation.

READ NOW

1. **Encourage formalized RSI practices at your institution.** The Department of Education (DOE) requires that institutions ensure RSI occurs (Distance Education and Innovation, 2020, p. [54809](#)). As a designer, you can help faculty plan for these critical interactions. A formal planning tool will serve as evidence that the institution has a process to ensure RSI and will likely end up as part of the course evaluation process at some institutions. Encouraging this formalized process will give everyone the same goal and accountability, along with helping to protect the institution against any future regulatory action.
2. **Don't abandon proven design principles or teaching practices.** Educators and regulators agree that interaction benefits students. The purpose of these regulations is not for us to convince faculty to conform to a methodology but to ensure students are receiving a minimum amount of a critical component in the teaching process. If you have a proven effective practice, do not worry about whether it is accepted as a documentable RSI; present it to the faculty member for their consideration and build it into the course.
3. **Help faculty document the ways they are already meeting RSI standards.** An influential faculty member will likely meet the letter of the RSI regulations without any change of practices. For instance, while not mentioned by name, online office hours will meet one of the two required interactions (p. [54760](#)). Providing individualized feedback will meet the other. Using their current practices as a starting point will make it much easier to design any additional interactions that might be needed.
4. **Design substantive interactions into the course schedule.** Since we have established that most faculty already practice substantive interactions, we need to turn our attention to the R in RSI "regular." The DOE requires interactions to be scheduled and predictable. Simply conducting substantive interactions is not enough—some faculty struggle in this area. Students must know which types of interactions to expect and when. Syllabus policies should state a reasonable maximum response timeframe for assignment feedback, scheduled office hours, and a course schedule listing every instance of direct instruction and facilitated discussion forums.
5. **Don't stop at the minimum!** A criticism of the regulations has been that the bar is set too low. If online office hours and personalized assignment feedback meet the minimum requirement, there is quite a bit of room between the minimum threshold of the regulation and

exemplary instructional practice. Use these federal requirements as a conversation starter and guide faculty toward a level of interaction that will truly engage students.

6. **Keep up to date.** In addition to the great resources from the TOPkit community (see below), the WCET frontiers blog has succeeded in keeping the higher Ed community current on new developments. We expect them to continue post as the regulation is interpreted through practice. Here are a few of their posts chronicling the story of this new regulation. If you are unfamiliar with the negotiated rulemaking process that created this version of the statute, you may find the [4/26/2019 entry](#) fascinating.

- 9/30/2016: [Interpreting what is Required for Regular and Substantive Interaction](#)
- 10/17/2017: [OIG Report on WGU, Part 3: A Brief History of Regular and Substantive Interaction](#)
- 4/26/2019: [Negotiated Rulemaking: The Complexity of Regular and Substantive Interaction](#)
- 4/3/2020: [New Regulations Review #1: Regular & Substantive Interaction](#)
- 8/26/2021: [Regular and Substantive Interaction Refresh: Reviewing & Sharing Our Best Interpretation of Current Guidance and Requirements](#)

---

## From the Community

# Background Conversation and Best Practices Surrounding RSI and Engagement

Why Engagement is So Important, Why it is Regulated, and Why Institutions are Taking More Notice Lately

From an instructional design perspective, interaction is a key to learning and success. Regulators point to student success as a reason for using interaction as a determinant for financial aid eligibility. Spurred by an audit of one large institution, others are keenly aware of the need to proactively comply with the amended regulations. Digital learning leaders offer guidance about policies. [Tom Cavanagh](#) and [Kelvin Thompson](#), TOPcast ([Teaching Online Podcast](#)) hosts from the University of Central Florida's [Division of Digital Learning](#), provide background and set the stage for the RSI discussion in [TOPcast Episode 31: WGU Did What? \(Or Did They?\)](#). See their additional links for context and expert analysis as things unfolded. [Russ Poulin](#) and [Cheryl Dowd](#), both from [WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies \(WCET\)](#), join Tom and Kelvin to discuss a variety of federal regulations in [TOPcast Episode 58: Fun with Regulations](#). RSI conversations began at the 14:00 mark.

The TOPkit community offers several relevant faculty development practitioner resources worth exploring, too. These follow.

Ask ADDIE. (2022, February). *Essential work or essential workers: Who can tell? (Issue 25)*. TOPkit. <https://topkit.org/2022/02/08/essential-work-or-essential-workers/>

Ask ADDIE. (2017, April). *Experience (with great engagement) really can be the best teacher (Issue 3)*. TOPkit. <https://topkit.org/2017/04/05/experience-great-engagement-really-can-best-teacher-issue-3/>

*Best practices for using video in online learning*. (n.d.). TOPkit. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://topkit.org/developing/tools-techniques-strategies/best-practices-for-using-video-in-online-learning/>

Williams, F. (n.d.). Online best practices that work. TOPkit. <https://topkit.org/developing/tools-techniques-strategies/online-best-practices-that-work/>

---

## Top Community Topics



- [Evaluating - Checklists & Rubrics](#)
- [Call for Contributions](#)
- [Ask ADDIE](#)
- [Developing - Best Practices for Using Video in Online Learning](#)
- [Developing - Sample Course](#)

## Works Referenced or Cited

[See document →](#)

### Developer and Editor

Bren Bedford, MNM, Web Project Analyst, Center for Distributed Learning, University of Central Florida

### Editors

Amanda E. Major, Ed.D., PMP, CPTD, Instructional Designer and Project Manager, Center for Distributed Learning, University of Central Florida

Florence Williams, Ph.D., Associate Instructional Designer, Center for Distributed Learning, University of Central Florida

---

Get social with #TOPkit





**Center for  
Distributed Learning**

Digital Learning Newsroom

University of Central Florida

[Unsubscribe](#)

---

© 2024 UCF Digital Learning Newsroom, All rights reserved

