

Theoria Technical College

Distance Education Contact, Feedback & Credit Hour Compliance Guidelines

Effective Date: July 2025

Approved by: Academics Department

Applies to: All Distance Education (Asynchronous Online and Hybrid) Courses

Purpose

This policy ensures that all asynchronous online and hybrid courses offered at Theoria Technical College meet or exceed standards for:

- Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)
- Timely and meaningful feedback
- Instructor's presence and engagement
- Credit hour equivalency for asynchronous instruction
- Compliance with ACCJC and U.S. Department of Education Regulations
- Alignment with Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) across all modalities, ensuring that distance education students achieve the same academic competencies and professional skills expected in face-to-face learning environments.

Scope

Applies to all asynchronous online, hybrid, and online synchronous courses delivered via LMS, Adobe Connect, or other distance learning platforms. These standards apply to faculty and instructional staff across all departments and programs. Instructors are responsible for ensuring that distance education activities are intentionally designed to support and assess Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs), just as in traditional classroom settings.

I. Instructor Presence and Communication

Minimum Expectations:

- Instructors must initiate weekly contact through:
 - Announcements or weekly overviews
 - Personalized emails or LMS messages
 - Audio/video check-ins
 - Active participation in discussion forums
- Faculty must log into the LMS and review communications at least four times per week.
- Instructors' contact details (email, virtual office hours, preferred method) must be:
 - Included in the syllabus
 - Posted on the course homepage

II. Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

To meet federal and ACCJC compliance, faculty must incorporate at least two RSI strategies per week.

(4) For purposes of this definition, 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:

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(5) 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:

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

(ii) 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.

(Source: Department of Education, Code of Federal Regulations, (RSI) from 34 CFR 600.2 Academic Engagement, Distance Education)

For Theoria Technical College this includes:

- Live or recorded lectures and narrated content
- Timely, substantive feedback on student assignments
- Responses to discussion boards or student inquiries
- Virtual office hours or Q&A sessions
- Proactive outreach to disengaged students

Please Note: Simply logging into the LMS does not count as RSI.

III. Feedback Timelines

To promote academic success and student satisfaction:

- Graded assignments, discussions, and formative assessment feedback: Returned within 10 business days (14 calendar days)
- Response to student questions (email, LMS, etc.): Within 48 hours (excluding weekends)

IV. Credit Hour Equivalency for Asynchronous Online and Hybrid Courses

Courses must demonstrate academic engagement and equivalent workload to face-to-face courses.

Online Hybrid Courses

Undergraduate Face-to-Face Courses

Undergraduate courses are assigned to 135 hours of instructor and student work or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of about 15 weeks in length.

Lecture/Seminar and Out of Class Student Work:

One unit of credit is assigned to 15 hours of direct faculty instruction with a minimum of two to three hours of out of classroom time spent preparing for class, studying, doing homework, or research per week, or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of about 15 weeks in length.


In Class Instruction		Out of Class Student Work		Total Units Awarded
1 hour instruction per week		2 hours of out-of-class student work per week		Minimum students work for 1 credit unit
x 15 weeks	+	x 15 weeks	=	↓
15 hours instruction or more		30 hours of additional student work for that course		45 hours

Other Academic Activities (e.g. labs, internships, studio, hybrid, or online)

Internship/Field Experience (Employer Instruction and Supervision):

One unit of credit is assigned to 3 hours of student work per week throughout one semester of approximately 15 weeks in length or approximately 45 hours of work, or an established equivalency to be determined by the department offering the course that reasonably approximates this same amount of work.

These hours worked will be guided and supervised by the employer providing the student with field experience and exposing students to best practices in a licensed Early Childcare program.

Internship Hours Simplified		Total Internship Hours Completed		Total Units Awarded
3 hours of student work		45 hours of student work		Minimum student work for 1 credit
x 15 weeks	OR	1 semester	=	
45 hours of student work		= 3 hours per week x 15 weeks		45 hours

Fieldwork hours and evaluations are verified by supervising staff at the licensed childcare center where the student is employed. If a student is unemployed, they may volunteer at a licensed childcare facility to gain internship hours and evaluation.

Other Academic Activities (e.g. labs, internships, studio, hybrid, or online)

Professional Development Laboratory (Instructor Guidance and Supervision):

One unit of credit is assigned to 3 hours of student work per week throughout one semester of approximately 15 weeks in length or approximately 45 hours of work, or an established equivalency to be determined by the department offering the course that reasonably approximates this same amount of work.

These hours worked in a licensed Early Childcare program will include one Field Application Assessment per 5 hours, totaling 5 Field Application Assessments documenting those 45 hours worked. Field Application Assessments are designed to bridge theory and practice, allowing students to apply course concepts to real-world scenarios in the field of early childhood education. By engaging in practical scenarios and assessment questions, students will enhance their critical thinking and decision-making skills in relation to industry practices. This element directly supports the practicum aspects of the course, enabling students to draw connections between the theoretical knowledge gained in class and its practical application in real-world settings. Through scenario-based assessments and accompanying video resources, students gain a comprehensive understanding of key topics essential for professional development in childcare and early childhood development.

Laboratory Hours Simplified		Total Laboratory Hours Completed		Total Units Awarded
3 hours of student work		45 hours of student work		Minimum student work for 1 credit
x 15 weeks	OR	1 semester	=	↓
45 hours of student work		= 3 hours per week x 15 weeks		45 hours

Asynchronous 5-Week Courses (3 Units = 135 Hours)

Undergraduate Online (Asynchronous) Courses

One five-week course is assigned to 135 hours of instructor and student work or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of about 15 weeks in length.

Lecture/Seminar:

Courses where instructors and students do not meet in the same space. Regardless of mode of instruction, courses should be consistent in terms of quality, assessment, learning outcomes, requirements, etc. as courses offered face-to-face with the same department prefix, number, and course title. Faculty must demonstrate active academic engagement.

One unit of credit is assigned to eight hours of faculty instruction through live lectures, notes, videos, or including, but not limited to discussion board engagement per week for five weeks. In addition, students must participate out of class with a minimum of six hours spending time preparing for class, studying, doing homework, or research per week, or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of about 15 weeks in length.

In Class Instruction		Out of Class Student Work		Total Units Awarded
8-hour instruction per week		6 hours of out-of-class student work per week		Minimum students work for 1 credit unit
x 5 weeks	+	x 5 weeks	=	↓
15 hours instruction or more		30 hours of additional student work for that course		45 hours

Independent Study:

Courses that permit a student to study a subject or topic in considerate depth beyond the scope of a regular course. Students meet periodically, as agreed upon with the faculty members, for the duration of the course. Faculty provides guidance, criticism, and review of the students' work. Students demonstrate competency through the completion of a final assessment either by submitting a final paper, project or portfolio, etc. as required by the faculty member.

Two credits are assigned to 18 hours of in class Independent Study which includes interactive tutorials, readings, peer group discussions, and/or virtual study/project groups, discussion board assignments, research papers, final projects, quizzes, exams, etc. per week for five weeks,

or completing an established equivalency that reasonably approximates this same amount of work, throughout one semester of about 15 weeks in length.

Independent Hours Per Week		Independent Hours Per Day		Total Units Awarded
18 hours of student work		2.5 hours of student work		Minimum student work for 1 credit
x 5 weeks	>	x 1 day	=	↓
90 hours of student work		= 18 hours per week x 5 weeks		90 hours

Please Note: Simply logging into the LMS does not count as RSI.

Online Asynchronous Courses are assigned 135 total hours for 3 units over 5 weeks.

Independent study, lab, or internship equivalents must meet the 45 hours per unit requirement through approved structured activities and evaluations.

V. Syllabus Requirements

All syllabi for online/hybrid courses must include:

- Instructor's availability and office hours
- Clear feedback turnaround expectations
- Description of RSI strategies used in the course
- Weekly schedule with any live sessions noted
- Explanation of credit hour expectations and weekly time commitment

VI. Monitoring Student Engagement

Faculty are expected to:

- Track LMS activity and discussion participation
- Identify and contact students with one week or more of inactivity
- Use available tools (i.e. external tracking data, LMS tracking) to flag disengagement
- Document outreach and escalate concerns to Student Services or Academic Affairs

VII. Instructor Training and Compliance

All distance education faculty must:

- Complete DE compliance training upon hiring
- Attend quarterly refreshers on RSI, LMS usage, and feedback standards

Compliance will be reviewed via:

- End-of-course evaluations
- LMS course audits
- Annual Quality Assurance Reviews

Noncompliance may result in retraining, observation, or reassignment.

(Source: ACCJC Standards 2.A.7 and 2.C.2)

VIII. References and Supporting Tools

- Federal Regulations: 34 CFR 668.8(k) and (l)
- WSCUC Credit Hour Policy: <https://www.wscuc.org/content/credit-hour-policy>
- Department of Education:
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2009/credit.html>
- Faculty Handbook
- External Data i.e. surveys, feedback, end of course evaluations, etc.
- Orbund and Adobe Connect
- Student Orientation

Revision and Review

As part of annual policy review, the Academics Department will assess whether Distance Education instructional practices and student learning assessments continue to reflect and support Theoria's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and program-level competencies, in alignment with ACCJC Standard 2.6.