Senate Taskforce - Accreditation and RSI

Executive Summary

At the request of President Garcia, the Academic Senate convened a Taskforce on Accreditation and Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) whose mandate includes compiling faculty recommendations to enhance RSI, considering both immediate and long-term needs for faculty support, and ensuring alignment with Accreditation Standards, in anticipation of a recommendation from the ACCJC requiring the College demonstrate compliance with Standard II.A.7 and the Commission Policy on Distance and Correspondence Education regarding Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI).

Chaired by Allie Frickert and comprising members from various educational backgrounds, inclusive of FA, Senate, Accreditation, and DLC leadership, the taskforce recommends implementing a two-phase RSI strategy. The initial phase focuses on short-term goals to prepare faculty for the Fall 2024 semester, emphasizing faculty mentorship and online course review with the locally approved RSI rubric which was created based on federal RSI standards.

The subsequent phase aims at sustainably institutionalizing RSI practices in online courses to meet the College mission of "providing an engaging and supportive teaching and learning environment for students of diverse origins, experiences, needs, abilities," while also meeting federal standards for RSI continuously.

This comprehensive approach involves strategic training for faculty, compensation for mentors and coordinators to facilitate these objectives, and coordination with academic administrators to ensure the sustainable integration of RSI criteria into the college's distance education framework.

History

RSI was called REC (regular effective contact) due to its previous definition in Title 5. In 2018, a faculty workgroup was tasked to create a rubric and process to review REC. Recommendations from this workgroup were approved by DLC in October 2019 and approved by full Senate in February 2020. Before this process could be negotiated, the pandemic created new priorities and discussion of the rubric was tabled. After the worst of the emergency was over, regulations regarding RSI had changed. The DLC reworked the rubric to be the RSI rubric, incorporating federal and state language, in September 2022. It was approved by the full Academic Senate in September 2022. Instead of its own workgroup, the RSI Rubric was added to the Canvas Merging Shells and Related Matters workgroup, with both faculty and administrators, for shared governance input. Although the workgroup finalized the RSI rubric in June 2023, there has been no forward movement since that time.

Purpose and Function

The Taskforce charge is to compile a set of prioritized faculty recommendations for addressing Accreditation concerns regarding RSI and the specific needs for support in implementing said recommendations both short and long term.

Goals

- To align recommendations to the Accreditation Core Inquiry and the Standards in keeping with the College mission.
- To review other colleges and their best RSI practices.
- To build on the work of the DLC and the recommendations on RSI from previous workgroups.
- To complete these recommendations within an urgent timeframe.

Membership

Consistent with the Academic Senate Constitution, the following faculty have been appointed to this taskforce by the President of the Senate:

Task Force Chair: Allie Frickert (Accreditation Assistant-Coordinator)

Task Force Members:

- Barbara Mezaki (Accreditation Coordinator)
- Shiloh Blacksher (Senate Exec)
- Raul Madrid (Senate Exec)
- Tamra Horton (FA Exec)
- Jenny Gernhart (FA alternate)
- Carol Impara (DL Coordinator and DLC Co-Chair)
- Catherine McKee (Assistant DL Coordinator, DLC)
- Hong Guo (REC workgroup, DLC, Data Coach)
- L.E. Foisia (DLC and SCE)

Methods of Consultation

The task force was approved during the Academic Senate meeting on March 14, 2024. Taskforce meetings were held synchronously via Zoom on March 15, 22, and 28. Members also collaborated asynchronously via e-mail and shared documents in OneDrive from the task force's inception until the final meeting. Periodically, members also met off-schedule to complete tasks and continue the write-up of the final report. Allie Frickert and Barbara Mezaki served as note takers for the meetings and a shared folder was created to store resources.

The task force considered reports and research methods developed and implemented by other colleges, with Kapi'olani College and Moreno Valley College serving as benchmarks to enhance best practices based on data. Based on these examples, the taskforce is confident that our recommendation is very similar to both colleges who have proven results using a one-on-one peer mentor model and rubrics to support RSI.

Following the change from the standard of "regular and effective contact" to "regular and substantive interaction" in federal law, Kapi'olani Community College created a local definition of RSI, instituted RSI rubrics for both basic and collaborative RSI review and created a process to review over 400 courses. To complete this RSI review, Kapi'olani used two (2) head coaches and twenty-two (22) coaches. Following this success, they institutionalized the RSI review process for all distance education faculty, and survey results reflect positive feedback from faculty involved.

Moreno Valley College (MVC) received an ACCJC recommendation to ensure "substantive instructor-initiated contact" with students in distance education classes, with a follow-up accreditation visit in 18-months. Shortly thereafter, the pandemic and stay-at-home order resulted in 90% of MVC classes going online. The college created an RSI checklist, updates to AP 4105 and other policies and processes. Nine (9) faculty trainers provided centralized training, peer-to-peer support, and multiple processes for evaluating regular and substantive interactions in distance education courses to over 300 faculty. MVC College leadership opted to institutionalize RSI training to ensure a quality educational experience for students in online classes.

Meetings

Four to five consecutive meetings on Fridays at 3pm beginning 3/15. Part of the group met informally beginning 3/1.

Specific and Achievable Recommendations from the Academic Senate for Addressing RSI

The task force has developed a two-phase process that has both immediate and ongoing plans to ensure that college distance education courses meet the federal standard for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI). In each of the two-phase process, there are specific recommendations.

Phase 1 is a short-term plan to address immediate needs to ensure all faculty teaching in Fall 2024 would demonstrate RSI. Phase 1 would begin Summer 2024 and extend to Spring 2025. Phase 2 is a long-term plan to institutionalize on-going support for demonstration of RSI in all online courses. If both phases are not implemented, the College will continue to face challenges ensuring continued RSI in online courses. Therefore, this task force strongly suggests that all recommendations be funded and implemented, and the task force strongly suggests that all recommendations, listed in priority order, be fully funded and implemented.

Efforts undertaken by the RSI coordinators will be communicated and coordinated with appropriate academic administrators to ensure timely faculty completion of RSI training.

PHASE 1 – Immediate needs – Summer 2024 to Spring 2025

Recommendation 1: Deploy RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers for Fall 24 and Winter 25

The criteria for selecting RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers will include SPOT certification, extensive online teaching experience, and a self-identified passion for teaching online. There will also be consideration for distribution of Mentors Reviewers across Divisions proportionately. RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers will be appointed by m, Academic Senate. RSI Faculty Peer Mentors Reviewers will be trained in the same norms and will take an appreciative inquiry framework to the process. According to the data from surveys about SPOT training, faculty found tailored advice and one-on-one interactions most impactful for learning and improvement.

Based on the fall schedule, trained faculty **RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers will need to review approximately 450 courses**. This number is based on the number of distinct faculty assigned to teach a fully online asynchronous course in Fall 2024 and the number of sections not assigned at the time of this report. Additional faculty may need to be reviewed depending on scheduling changes.

Modality Type	# of Sections	# of Sections, not Assigned	# of Distinct Faculty Assigned
Fully Online Asynchronous	938	61	390

**Data provided by the Office of Instruction on March 28, 2024*

It is estimated that **each faculty's course will take 3 hours to review.** These 3 hours would consist of reviewing the faculty's course shell and providing detailed feedback on the RSI rubric (1.5hr), meeting with the faculty to member to discuss the review and make recommendations (1hr), revisiting the course to ensure appropriate updates have been made and additional conversations with the faculty member as necessary (.5hr). **This totals 1350 hours to review 450 faculty courses.** In addition to the hours necessary to conduct the reviews, RSI Faculty Peer Mentors must also complete a norms training session in DL best practices and ACCJC's appreciative inquiry approach, monthly check-in meetings, tracking course reviews, and progress reports to RSI Coordinators (see recommendation 2). Attending a norms training will be mandatory to serve as an RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewer, as it is essential to provide consistent and equitable reviews across multiple RSI Mentors. These responsibilities are estimated to be **an additional 10 hours per RSI Faculty Peer Mentor**.

Compensation for RSI Faculty Peer Mentor-Reviewers:

Compensation for this important RSI work should be by LHE (option to spread across Fall and Winter), or at the non-instructional rate, if preferred by faculty. The task force asserts it is important to have these options to allow for flexibility in faculty schedules and teaching load, as well as providing flexibility for faculty undergoing review.

Summary of workload:	**Hours to be compensated**	**Equivalent LHE** *1 LHE = 42.67 hours*
Completion of 450 course reviews *(based of estimation of 3 hours per course review)*	1350 hours	31.64 LHE
Norms training, meeting, communication, tracking and reporting per RSI Faculty Mentor	10 hours/mentor	0.23 LHE/mentor

It is recommended that this work be divided among 9-10 RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers.

9 RSI Mentors
450 course reviews / 9 = 50 courses each
(50 courses x 3 hours) + 10 hours of training = 160 hours
160 hours / 42.67 hrs (1LHE) = 3.75 LHE per mentor

10 RSI Mentors
450 course reviews / 9 = 45 courses each
(45 courses x 3 hours) + 10 hours of training = 145 hours
145 hours / 42.67 hrs (1LHE) = 3.40 LHE per mentor

One-time Compensation for Faculty Undergoing RSI Review Fall 24 and Winter 25
Additionally, compensation at the non-instructional rate should be provided for each faculty member who completes the RSI Rubric Process during Fall 24 and Winter 25 to incentivize timely completion. Faculty should receive 2 hours of compensation at the non-instructional rate: 1 hour for a self-assessment of their course using the RSI rubric and 1 hour for the meeting with their RSI Faculty Peer Mentor. Using an estimated $65/hour for the non-instructional rate, at 2 hours each for 450 faculty, this cost would be approximately $58,500. This compensation would only be for this initial effort to get all faculty scheduled to teach online demonstrating RSI by Winter 2025. Beyond Winter 2025, it is expected that the demonstration of RSI will be an institutionalized part of the SPOT completion and recertification process.

Recommendation 2:
RSI Faculty Coordinators for Summer 2024 to Spring 2025

It is recommended that 2 RSI Faculty Coordinators be appointed by Academic Senate to establish comprehensive tracking protocols, coordinate communication among RSI Faculty Peer Mentors (recommendation 1), and share responsibilities related to documenting and tracking the RSI work as outlined below. Efforts undertaken by the RSI coordinators will also be communicated and coordinated with appropriate academic administrators to ensure timely faculty completion of RSI training.

The recommended compensation for each RSI coordinator is 7 LHE to be spread across Summer 2024 to Spring 2025 with the following responsibilities.

- Late Spring to Summer 2024 – 2 LHE each
    - Develop the list of faculty to be assigned to RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers for Fall 2024.

    - Recruit RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers and have the appointed by Academic Senate for Fall 2024.
    - Create a tracking mechanism with reviewer assignments (Smartsheet, shared Excel sheet, Canvas shell, etc.)
    - Communicate and coordinate regularly with administration on progress
    - Develop the norms training for all reviewers
        - Academic administrators are invited to these trainings
    - Recruit a small number of volunteers for pilot program to take place in summer, with results communicated to administration
    - Prepare and implement department chair training (regular chair training that occurs a week prior to Fall)
    - Begin the mandatory norms training based on availability of the reviewers such as Fall FLEX.

- Fall 2024 – 2 LHE each
    - Facilitate early semester campus outreach such as town hall or forum in coordination with DLC, Senate, and the Accreditation Core Team.
    - Track and affirm reviewers for Fall 2024.
    - Confidentially store final rubrics as evidence for ACCJC.
    - Organize and hold monthly check-in meetings for all reviewers for ongoing norming alignment and communication.
    - Develop the list of faculty to be assigned to an RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewer for Winter 2025.
    - Continue to monitor other college plans for implementing RSI rubrics, etc.
    - Communicate and coordinate regularly with administration
    - Report out progress to constituency groups (Accreditation team, Academic Senate, DLC, PAC, etc.).
    - Work with RSI Peer Mentor-Reviewers to identify best practices to showcase and facilitate a late-semester Summit to celebrate and share best practices.

- Winter 2025 – 1 LHE each
    - Track and affirm RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewers for Winter 2025
    - Monitor faculty scheduled to teach online courses in Spring 2025, identify those who have not completed an RSI review with a mentor, and assign them to an RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewer.
    - Continue to monitor other college plans for implementing RSI rubrics etc.
    - Communicate and coordinate regularly with administration
    - Prepare a FLEX Day update or training

- Spring 2025- 2 LHE each
    - Conduct surveys of results and track data
    - Write reports in collaboration with Accreditation Core Team
    - Continue to monitor other college plans for implementing RSI rubrics, etc.
    - Communicate and coordinate with administration

Recommendation 3: Campus Outreach- Early Semester Campus RSI Forum/Town Hall and Late Semester Celebratory Summit

To ensure alignment and transparency, an early semester forum or town hall hosted by the RSI Faculty Coordinators, DLC, and the Accreditation Core Team will provide an opportunity to review plans, gather feedback, and foster collaboration in addressing accreditation concerns related to RSI in Distance Education through appreciative inquiry.

To celebrate and disseminate best practices in Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in online teaching, a late semester summit hosted by the RSI Faculty Coordinators, DLC, and the Accreditation Core Team will serve as a platform for faculty to showcase their successes, exchange insights, and inspire one another in enhancing the quality of online education at Mt. SAC. By highlighting effective strategies and innovations identified through peer mentoring and the RSI Rubric evaluation, educators can collectively refine their approaches to RSI, fostering continuous improvement in online teaching practices. Moreover, such a summit cultivates a sense of community and collaboration among faculty in alignment with ACCJC's appreciative inquiry framework.

The resources needed for hosting these proposed events include sufficient administrative support and communication essential for coordinating efforts and disseminating information among faculty and other stakeholders. This includes the LHE release time proposed for RSI Faculty Coordinators and the commitment for time for Classified Professionals, such as the FCLT team. A follow-up survey conducted by FCLT would determine future training needs based on demonstrations that faculty are interested in learning more about.

Recommendation 4: Reconvene the task force following the ACCJC accreditation report in Summer 2024

Once the official accreditation report from ACCJC is received in Summer 2024, the task force will reconvene to make additions or adjustments to these recommendations to align with the specific feedback provided in the accreditation report.

PHASE 2 – Institutionalization – Spring 2025 and Beyond

Recommendation 5: Ongoing RSI Faculty Coordinators to provide sustainability and institutionalization

Two permanent RSI Faculty Coordinators appointed by Academic Senate to manage the large volume of asynchronous online courses offered by the College (important to have a backup to not create a bottleneck). RSI Faculty Coordinators will be supported with 3-6 LHE each per year, to be calculated on the number of faculty who are completing their SPOT recertification. Their responsibilities will include:

- Serve on the Distance Learning Committee

- Review RSI of courses for faculty completing their SPOT recertification
- Coordinate the full recertification process (presently done by the Distance Learning coordinators)
- FA Contract section: Would be the default "designee" to review new course shells and the instructor's RSI plan with instructor (removing the unpaid hours from chairs unless they prefer to do this themselves).
- Will coordinate with FCLT on RSI training needs for faculty

Recommendation 6: Incorporate RSI into SPOT recertification process

This taskforce recommends that DLC modify the SPOT recertification process to include RSI as one of the four required hours of the current SPOT recertification process. This one hour of RSI might consist of the faculty member using the RSI rubric to self-assess their course, whereupon completion the faculty member can add to their course shell as an unpublished page.

Proposed Timeline

PHASE 1 – Immediate Needs	
June 2024	• Appointment of RSI Faculty Coordinators by Academic Senate.
Summer 2024	• RSI Faculty Coordinators will recruit Peer Mentor-Reviewers and create norms training with guidance from DL Coordinators. • With coordination and communication with administration, they will create a tracking sheet based on faculty assignments for Fall and begin assigning and training Mentors.
August 2024	• RSI Faculty Coordinators will contribute to FLEX Day and Chair Training prior to the Fall Semester.
Fall 2024	• RSI Faculty Coordinators to facilitate early semester campus outreach such as townhall/forums. • Faculty Peer Mentor-Reviewer team (including RSI Faculty Coordinators) begin RSI Rubric Reviews using the appreciative inquiry framework with individual faculty. • RSI Faculty Coordinators to communicate with team and administration, track changes, and coordinate monthly check-in meetings. • RSI Faculty Coordinators to confidentially store final rubrics as evidence for ACCJC. • RSI Faculty Coordinators to work with RSI Peer Mentor-Reviewers to identify best practices to showcase and facilitate a late-semester Summit to celebrate and share best practices.

	• RSI Faculty Coordinators to develop the list of faculty to be assigned to an RSI Faculty Peer Mentor Reviewer for Winter 2025.
Winter 2025	• Last phase of Peer Mentor Reviews to capture faculty not able to be evaluated in Fall, and/or new faculty scheduled for Spring. • RSI Faculty Coordinators to prepare a FLEX Day update or training. • RSI Faculty Coordinators to finalize evidence including a spreadsheet and confidentially stored RSI rubrics.
PHASE 2 - Institutionalization	
Spring 2025	• Ongoing RSI Faculty Coordinators appointed by Academic Senate to provide sustainability and institutionalization • RSI Faculty Coordinators to conduct surveys of results, track data, and contribute to reports in collaboration with Accreditation Core Team. • SPOT recertification process modified to include RSI as one of the four required hours of the current SPOT recertification process.
Fall 2025	• RSI Faculty Coordinators review RSI of courses for faculty completing their SPOT recertification.

Acronyms and Definitions in this Document

ACCJC = Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
DE = Distance Education
DE = Dual Enrollment
DL = Distance Learning (note: ACCJC uses Distance Education)
DLC = Distance Learning Committee
DL Coordinators = Distance Learning Coordinators
FA = Faculty Association
FCLT = Faculty Center for Learning and Teaching
LHE = Lecture hour equivalent
PAC = President's Advisory Council
REC = Regular and Effective Contact
RSI = Regular and Substantive Interaction
RSI Faculty Coordinator = proposed position appointed by Academic Senate
RSI Faculty Peer Mentor/Reviewer = proposed role appointed by Academic Senate
RSI Rubric = locally approved document for faculty evaluation of online courses
RSI Taskforce = group of faculty appointed by the Academic Senate to make recommendations to President Garcia
SPOT = Skills and Pedagogy for Online Teaching
SPOT Recertification = A four-year process for faculty to renew skills and pedagogy for distance learning courses
SPOT Reviewer = A trained peer reviewer who mentors faculty one-on-one going through the SPOT process