

Cañada College

Faculty Handbook for

Online Teaching & Learning

(2025-2028)



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Welcome, Cañada Distance Education Faculty

This handbook is designed to guide and support faculty in delivering high-quality, equitable, and accessible online and hybrid instruction. Whether you are new to teaching online or refining your virtual teaching practices, you will find practical tools, policy guidance, and professional development resources curated by the Cañada [Distance Education \(DE\) Team](#) in partnership with the Faculty [Teaching and Learning Team](#). This handbook supports faculty in designing inclusive, engaging, and accessible online learning environments aligned with the college's mission of equity and student success.

What's Included in this handbook:

- An overview of Cañada College's distance education framework, policies, and strategic goals;
- Certification and training recommendations for online teaching;
- Best practices in course design, accessibility, and student engagement;
- Detailed guidance on Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI);
- Information on course approval processes, evaluation, and faculty support;
- Resources for instructional technologies, peer online course review (POCR) process, and compliance with federal accessibility laws.

This document is updated regularly to reflect evolving policies, technologies, and student needs. We invite all faculty to explore, contribute, and return to this resource often as part of our shared commitment to online teaching excellence at Cañada College.

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Understanding Distance Education (DE)

The U.S. Department of Education is the federal agency that enacts and enforces the regulations in Title 34 of the [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\)](#), which govern higher education, including the legal definition of distance education. According to 34 CFR § 600.2, distance education is defined as:

(1) Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iv) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

In California, [Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations](#) provides additional requirements for distance education. Accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges ([ACCJC](#)) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges ([WASC](#)) further define online and hybrid instruction. Rather than relying solely on face-to-face interaction, instructors deliver content and engage with students using electronic methods, or a combination of in-person and electronic delivery.

These definitions inform DE institutional policy and instructional design at Cañada College and are foundational to the guidelines presented in this handbook. DE instruction includes a range of modalities, such as hybrid courses (partially online) and fully online courses, which may be delivered synchronously (real-time) or asynchronously (on-demand).

Importantly, students enrolled in DE courses are expected to engage and actively participate as they would in face-to-face courses. Attendance and engagement are measured through documented Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) between instructors and students, which is a key requirement for distance education compliance.

Preparing to Teach an Online Course

SMCCCD is committed to supporting students in achieving their education goals. Online education is a critical component of achieving this goal. However, student success and equity gaps exist within online education. To help address these gaps, the Cañada Distance Education Advisory Committee and Academic Senate strongly recommend that all online course instructors adopt the following standards:

- Develop a clear understanding of
 - the [SMCCCD's Distance Education Modalities](#).
 - the various strengths and weaknesses of these modes of delivery.
 - the specific student population being served.
 - the technology (both hardware and software).
 - the increased planning and development time upfront, compared to a traditional face-to-face class.
- Receive an approval from the department chair and/or dean.
- Ensure that the course has Distance Education (DE) Addendum
 - located in the Course Outline of Record (COR).
 - approved by the Curriculum Committee through [CurricUNET](#).
- Complete online teaching certification via an approved [Online Teaching Certification Pathway](#). Incoming faculty who would like to apply for certification equivalency should
 - fill out [DE Questionnaire](#).
 - submit course transcripts and an online (or hybrid) course for a consultative course review to ensure that the course is aligned with the OEI Course Design Rubric.
- Develop an online course using the Canvas LMS. This course needs to be
 - peer-reviewed.
 - aligned to the [OEI Course Design Rubric](#).
- Follow the [Countdown to Course Launch Checklist](#) to ensure a complete and high-quality course awaits students at the start of the semester.
- Make all instructional materials accessible and prepare to offer accommodations when needed ([Section 508](#) and [WCAG 2.0](#)).
- Prepare to set up and maintain Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) with all students, based on [ACCJC's Strategic Initiative](#).
- Commit to completing online teaching re-certification every 3 years via an approved [Online Teaching Certification Pathway](#).

The Cañada Teaching Resources Repository

The Distance Education team, in collaboration with the Faculty Teaching & Learning Center & Lounge and the Equity and Antiracism Planning Council, have created a repository for all the guides and resources faculty may need to reference when building an online course for the first time, or updating an existing online course. We invite you to explore the [Teaching Resources Repository](#) to get more detailed information on how to meet the expectations outlined in this handbook.

Distance Education (DE) Team

The Repository offers a wealth of information for faculty to reference at any time, and the DE team is also available by email, Zoom, or in-person consultations to answer questions, discuss course ideas, and collaborate with faculty.

The Cañada College distance education (DE) team consists of the instructional designer, instructional technologist, faculty DE coordinator, and the dean of ASLT. Together, they oversee and support all aspects of online teaching and learning, including the adoption of new technologies that enhance course quality. Faculty proposals, new ideas, and early-stage projects are first brought to the Distance Education Advisory Committee (DEAC), and then, as appropriate, to the Academic Senate and the Instructional Planning Council (IPC). More information about DEAC's role in our DE work can be found on the [DEAC website](#).

Related Committees

The following committees work in partnership with Cañada's DE Team:

- Cañada College Distance Education Advisory Committee ([DEAC](#));
- [SMCCCD District DEAC](#);
- [Cañada College Technology Committee](#);
- [District Academic Senate \(DAS\)](#);
- [Cañada College Academic Senate](#);
- [Cañada College Textbook Affordability Subcommittee](#);
- [Cañada College Instructional Planning Council \(IPC\)](#).

Distance Education (DE) Course Approval

New distance education courses must undergo a formal approval process before they can be offered in an online or hybrid format. Transitioning from a traditional classroom to a virtual environment requires more than simply uploading existing lectures, notes, and readings; faculty are expected to carefully evaluate their courses and adapt instructional materials for effective online delivery.

Faculty seeking to develop a new online course or adapt an existing course, including the Course Outline of Record (COR), must obtain approval from their department chair and/or dean prior to offering the course online.

According to the Cañada [Distance Education Guidance](#) webpage, SMCCCD recommends the following steps for approving the development of an online course:

- The instructor creates a list that explains the advantages of offering the course online, with a focus on how students will benefit from the distance education (DE) modality.
- The instructor ensures that the COR for the existing course is current.
- The instructor confirms with the [Curriculum Committee](#) that the DE Addendum exists for the desired course to be taught online.
- If not, the DE Addendum is created within the [CurricUNET](#) per [detailed guidelines](#).
The DE Addendum describes differences between face-to-face and DE versions of the course. Additional requirements are:
 - The DE course has the same lecture/lab content.
 - The DE course is evaluated via the same SLOs.
 - The DE Addendum is course-specific (not instructor-specific).
 - Articulation with CSU/UC should not be affected by offering the course through distance learning.
- The DE Addendum is reviewed and approved by the Faculty DE Coordinator.
- The DE Addendum is submitted to the Curriculum Committee addressing the following:
 - Sufficient consideration has been given to adaptations of methods of instruction and methods of evaluation to ensure adequate Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) as required per Title 5, ACCJC standards, and the proposed SMCCCD RSI Policy (See Appendix 1: RSI).
 - Necessary technical requirements are satisfied.
 - Accessibility is ensured as required (Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 guidelines).

Online Teaching Certification Requirements & Recommendations at Cañada College

Faculty teaching in any distance education modality (online asynchronous or synchronous, hybrid, or multi-modality) must complete Canvas LMS online teaching training before teaching online for the first time. The Cañada DE Team also recommends that faculty every three years. This training ensures faculty are prepared to deliver high-quality, accessible instruction that meets both district and state standards.

Our District offers Quality Online Teaching & Learning (QOTL) training several times each academic year. The courses are facilitated by Instructional Technologists, Instructional Designers, and DE Coordinators from our three sister colleges. QOTL is delivered as an asynchronous online Canvas course, allowing faculty to experience learning from a student's perspective. SMCCCD faculty are compensated for completion of QOTL courses. Below are the available options for completing QOTL (or equivalent training) to earn online teaching certification.

Step 1 - Certification	
QOTL 1 - This training is great for faculty who are brand new to online teaching, or brand new to Canvas. This is also a great option for faculty who haven't received an online teaching certification in more than 10 years.	OR <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Equivalent Training from Another College, Completed in the Last 3 Years*<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Training must have included Canvas LMS, online teaching pedagogy, RSI, accessibility training, and building an online course from scratch.• @One's Online Teaching & Design course, completed in the Last 3 Years*.
Step 2 - Re-certification (After 3 Years)	

<p>QOTL 2 - This training is meant for faculty who have completed QOTL 1 or an equivalent online teaching certification 3 years ago, and are ready to get re-certified. The content of QOTL 2 builds on the content of QOTL 1 and takes faculty to a more advanced level of online teaching training.</p>	<p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit your existing online course for POCR Course Review, followed by alignment to the OEI Course Design Rubric; • Become a POCR Reviewer (and review 3 courses); • Complete the ZTC/OER conversion process for one course; • Complete 3 Facilitated (3 unit) @One Courses; • Complete 5 Self-Paced @One Courses.
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Step 3 - Ongoing Quality Improvement (Every 3 Years)

Every 3 years, repeat either QOTL 2 (you can choose a different course content pathway), or another equivalent component(s) above, to maintain your online teaching certification.

The District Distance Education Advisory Committee (D-DEAC) is currently in the process of developing a new training, QOTL 3. More details about this additional option for Ongoing Quality Improvement (beyond QOTL 2) are coming soon.

***If you would like to apply for QOTL 1 equivalency**, we invite you to fill out the [DE Questionnaire](#), then submit your course transcripts and your online (or hybrid) course for a consultative course review to ensure that your course is aligned with the OEI Course Design Rubric. To submit your transcripts, receive instructions for consultative course review, and to ask questions, please email our [DE coordinator](#).

Peer Online Course Review (POCR)

Peer Online Course Review ([POCR](#)) is the initiative of California Virtual Campus ([CVC](#)). Certified POCR reviewers use the POCR process to review online courses based on the criteria compiled in the CVC-OEI Rubric. Such course alignment increases course quality and accessibility, and closes persistent equity gaps in online courses.

The POCR process is intended to build a community of practice around quality course design that extends across departments and divisions. If you would like to learn more about Cañada's POCR process, please visit our [POCR website](#). For questions about POCR, please contact our [DE Coordinator](#).

Faculty Requirements for Technology Competency in Online Teaching

To teach effectively online at Cañada College, faculty must have access to current technology and demonstrate the technological competencies needed to design, deliver, and support quality online learning. This includes the use of college-supported instructional tools and platforms that promote engagement, accessibility, and regular and substantive interaction (RSI).

Faculty are encouraged to review the [Instructional Technology Tools Guide](#) for an overview of the technologies supported by Cañada College, including Canvas, video conferencing platforms, multimedia creation tools, and accessibility resources. Staying current with these tools ensures consistency for students across courses and helps maintain compliance with district and accreditation standards for distance education.

Minimum Technology Hardware & Software Requirements

Faculty should have:

- A modern Mac or PC (ideally no more than three years old) with a current operating system;
- A reliable high-speed internet connection;
- An up-to-date web browser, such as [Firefox](#) or [Chrome](#).

Minimum Technological Skill Requirements

Faculty teaching online are expected to go beyond basic computer skills. They should be comfortable using:

- Canvas, our Learning Management System (LMS);
- Multimedia tools for video creation and editing (Panopto, YouTube, ScreenPal);
- Zoom, our online virtual meeting and classroom tool;
- Accessibility tools, techniques and accommodations;
- Online Communication tools, such as email, Canvas, Pronto and Zoom.

To support faculty in meeting these expectations, the [Online Technology Preparedness Guides](#) provide detailed information, tutorials, and recommendations.

Support Services

If you need assistance with integrating technology into your teaching:

- Contact your [Instructional Designer, Instructional Technologist or DE Coordinator](#) for individualized guidance and support.
- Visit the [SMCCD Information Technology Services](#) website for district-wide IT resources, support requests, and technology tools.

Accessibility in Online Education

At Cañada College, we are committed to ensuring equitable access to online education for all students. In compliance with [federal and state laws](#), as well as best practices in digital learning, accessibility is a foundational requirement for all distance education courses.

What Accessibility Means

“Accessible” means that a student with a disability can acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and receive the same services as a student without a disability, with substantially equivalent ease of use. While the experience may not be identical, it must offer an equal opportunity to succeed.

Key Accessibility Standards and Guidelines

Faculty must ensure that all course materials are accessible from the start of a course. This includes:

- All videos and lecture screencasts include accurate, accessible **captions** (not auto-generated captions);
- **Transcripts** are provided for all multimedia files (e.g., audio recordings);
- All embedded images, figures, formulas, and equations include descriptive **Alt Text**;
- All files and documents are formatted with standardized **styles** and structure to ensure compatibility with a wide range of screen readers;
- Accessibility **checkers** are consistently used (e.g., Microsoft Office, Adobe Acrobat Pro, Canvas checker, Ally, UDOIT, Pope Tech);
- PDFs are generated from **accessible source documents** and verified for accessibility.
- **Headings** in documents are used according to best practices;
- The course is evaluated using the **CVC-OEI Rubric**;
- Faculty collaborate with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to ensure appropriate **accommodations**. All third-party tools meet established accessibility **requirements**.

Faculty should follow the accessibility requirements outlined in:

- [CVC-OEI Course Design Rubric – Section D](#)
- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Standards](#)
- [Cañada College Disability Resource Center \(DRC\)](#)

Accessibility vs. Accommodations

- Accessibility is proactive. It is built into the course design so materials are usable by all students from the beginning (e.g., captioned videos, readable formats, accessible layouts).
- Accommodations are reactive. They are specific adjustments provided to students with documented needs (e.g., extended testing time, alternate formats).

Both are essential to student success and legal compliance.

Student Accommodation Services

The [DRC](#) provides support for students with verified disabilities. Faculty should:

- Include clear information in their syllabi about how students can request accommodations;
- Work closely with the DRC to ensure accommodations are implemented properly.
- Accommodations may include, but are not limited to:
 - Testing adjustments (extra time, distraction-reduced spaces),
 - [Implement Student Accommodations in Canvas Guide](#)
 - Accessible course materials and note-taking support,
 - [Explore Accessibility Resources on the Teaching Resource Repository](#)
 - Assistive technologies (screen readers, Kurzweil)
 - [How do I use Microsoft Immersive Reader as a Student?](#)
 - Communication access services (captions, interpreters),
 - [How to add automatic captions to Panopto videos](#)
 - Academic support (priority registration, counseling);

Accessibility Support and Resources

Cañada College provides robust support to help faculty meet accessibility standards:

- [Cañada College Online Teaching Accessibility Website](#)
- [OEI Course Design Resources](#)
- [Personalized support from the DE Team](#)

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Education updated its expectations for online instruction, replacing the previous requirement for “Regular Effective Contact” with the more robust standard of [Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI\)](#). This change was significant: only courses that meet RSI standards are eligible for federal financial aid, distinguishing them from correspondence education, which lacks consistent instructor engagement.

Why RSI Matters

Regular and substantive interaction is a cornerstone of high-quality online education. Research shows that RSI:

- Improves student motivation, retention, and success
- Builds a sense of community and connection
- Aligns with federal and accreditation standards

At Cañada College, RSI is both best practice and a requirement.

To Meet RSI Standards, Faculty Must:

- Provide predictable, proactive, and instructor-initiated communication throughout the course. This includes both synchronous and asynchronous online interaction, as appropriate to the course design.
- Clearly communicate RSI expectations in the syllabus and Canvas LMS at the start of the semester:
 - Explain how students can contact the instructor.
 - Specify the expected response time (e.g., within 24-48 hours).
 - Describe when and how feedback will be provided (e.g., weekly feedback on major assignments).
 - Summarize this information in a Communication Plan (placed in the syllabus, Canvas introductory module, and Canvas announcements).
- Provide multiple forms of instructor-initiated interaction, such as:
 - Weekly announcements
 - Regular and substantive feedback on assignments
 - Participation in discussion forums
 - Scheduled virtual office hours or live class sessions
- Encourage and facilitate student engagement, including:
 - Opportunities for student-to-student collaboration
 - Encouragement of questions and dialogue
 - Regular check-ins to assess understanding
- Use the LMS (e.g., Canvas Inbox) for communication:
 - Ensures FERPA compliance

- Creates a trackable record of interaction, which is important for accreditation
(Note: Canvas Inbox may not be fully accessible for reviewers, so consider providing alternative accessible formats when needed)

RSI Institutionalization

Cañada's RSI resources, activities and recordings are documented in the [RSI repository](#) on Cañada's Teaching and Learning website. Our goal is to engage with every online instructor to ensure that their RSI practices are effectively implemented to enhance student engagement and success. To that end, on September 25, 2025, Cañada College's Academic Senate passed [a resolution in support of aligning our DE courses with RSI standards](#).

As a regular part of [faculty evaluations](#), faculty who teach online are assessed on RSI, accessibility, course design, and instructional design of their course. The online class observation form indicates how the College assesses each of these aspects of the learning experience with respect to student equity and achievement. All forms and processes are continuously updated to reflect the latest federal and state guidelines, with current emphasis on the ACCJC's RSI Rubric and the updated CVC-OEI Rubric, which is expected to launch as a pilot in fall 2025.

RSI Resources

- [ACCJC 2024–25 Strategic Initiative: Distance Education Rubric](#) - Details the standards for high-quality distance education.
- [Cañada College RSI Information Page](#) - Cañada-specific resources for meeting and exceeding RSI expectations.
- [Faculty Teaching & Learning Website](#) - Provides resources, tools, and services designed to improve teaching practices, foster student success, and promote effective learning environments.
- [Microcourse: Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI in Action\)](#) - This 2-hour asynchronous microcourse focuses on the revised standards for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI), as outlined in Title V of the California Education Code.

Copyright & Fair Use Considerations for Course Material Adoption in Distance Education

When creating, selecting and/or adopting materials for distance education courses (both online and hybrid), it is important to ensure that their content aligns with the Course Outline of Record (COR), especially the DE Addendum, on [CurricUNET](#), while also meeting accessibility, copyright, and licensing requirements specific to digital delivery.

Selecting and Adopting Online Materials

Faculty teaching Distance Education (DE) courses are encouraged to prioritize digital, accessible, and cost-effective materials. Consider adopting Open Educational Resources (OER) or Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) materials that students can access directly through Canvas.

- Faculty using OER/ZTC materials should notify Jai Kumar (Bookstore Manager) at kumar@smccd.edu and Sarah Harmon (OER/ZTC Program Manager) at harmons@smccd.edu.
- For general textbook ordering policies and timelines, refer to [Cañada Bookstore](#) ordering guidelines.

Copyright and Fair Use in Online Courses

Copyright and fair use compliance can become more complex in online teaching, since course materials are usually posted, linked, digitized or streamed. Instructors are legally responsible for ensuring that any materials shared in Canvas or other online platforms comply with copyright and fair use laws.

When preparing online course materials:

- **Use licensed, public domain, or OER content** whenever possible to avoid copyright complications. These materials allow faculty to avoid trying to navigate the complicated world of copyright and fair use entirely. Review the [Alternatives to Fair Use Guide](#) for more information.
- **Link rather than upload** copyrighted materials when feasible. Linking to legitimate sources (e.g., library databases or publisher pages) helps avoid copyright infringement.
- If you must upload copyrighted content (e.g., scanned readings, images, or videos), ensure your use meets the Fair Use standards and is restricted to enrolled students within Canvas. For DE courses, **copyrighted content may be shared under Fair Use provisions**, but there may be special consideration for the format of material you are sharing.

- Review the [Use of Copyrighted Content in Online Teaching Guide](#) for DE-specific best practices.

Getting Support

Faculty who need to use copyrighted material and/or are unsure how to legally share it with their students, can contact our librarians and bookstore managers for help with fair use evaluation or obtaining permissions. The Bookstore can also help verify licensing for digital course materials. [Tools for evaluating permissions of materials](#) might be helpful to clarify what action is needed.

For broader copyright and fair use guidance (applicable to all courses), see the district's [Copyright](#) and [Fair Use](#) Policies.

Resources

Faculty Resources

- [Teaching & Learning Resource Directory](#)
- [Faculty Teaching & Learning Sessions](#)
- [SMCCCD Distance Education Modalities Definitions](#)
 - [Public-facing Distance Education Modality Definitions](#)
- [SMCCCD Distance Education Modalities Explainer Document](#)
- [Cañada College Copyright Guide](#)
 - [Cañada College Fair Use Guide](#)

Student Resources

- [Cañada College Online Learning](#)
- [SMCCCD Virtual Campus](#)
- [Cañada Library Technology Loan Program](#)
- [Cañada Learning Center Technology Help](#)
- [Student Services & Resources](#)

Editing Plan for DE Handbook 2025

Development Steps

1. Create (DE Team)
2. Edit and revise (broad faculty input / feedback, primarily via DEAC)
3. Review and sign off (stakeholders)
4. Present at IPC: Fall 2025
5. Submit to Academic Senate for approval: Fall 2025

Collaborators/stakeholders:

Primary stakeholders create and manage progress timeline, steps, and collaboration toward submission to the Academic Senate.

- Allison Hughes - Instructional Designer
- Lindsey Irizarry - Instructional Technologist
- Nada Nekrep - DE Coordinator
- Anniqua Rana - Dean, ASLT
- Terri Hannon - Adjunct Instructional Designer
- Jennifer McGuire - Adjunct Instructional Designer, (feat. accessibility)
- Erica Reynolds - Adjunct Instructional Designer