

# SJC Online Instructor & Student Support FAQs

## What is a Student Support Specialist?

A Student Support Specialist (also known as Advisor) is an online student's primary contact at SJC. After a student is admitted through Online Admissions, a Student Support Specialist is assigned to welcome and orient the student to SJC and go over all the resources and tools a student needs for success. Together, they navigate through course selection, registration, policies, goals, progress, program specific inquiries, and barriers that inevitably pop up along the way. Usually Student Support Specialists advise a specific group of programs, that's why you are connecting with one or two more frequently than the others. Currently, we have a team of six "advisors", and each carries a caseload of approximately 200-300 students. While instructors are academically guiding each student through the course, the advisor guides them through their entire experience at SJC. Due to the size of caseloads, the number of courses students are in, and current system limitations, Student Support Specialists will not know the moment a student falls behind, and this moment is crucial for course success and overall retention.

- You can find the advisor/Student Support Specialist assigned to a specific student in two places: Campus Cafe under the students contact information or on the enrollment confirmation email you were cc'ed on at the beginning of each term. If you don't know, you can always email [onlinestudentsupport@sjcme.edu](mailto:onlinestudentsupport@sjcme.edu) for help and we'll connect you with the right person. <https://my.sjcme.edu/resources/online-students/handbooks/academic-advisor/>

## When should an instructor contact the student support specialist?

As soon as you know that a student is falling behind or if you have entered F's for missing work. Since most courses are designed in weekly or bi-weekly structure, if two weeks have gone by without participation from the student, please contact the Student Support Specialist and your Program Director *immediately*. It often takes a team to help get a student back on track. Three to four weeks without participation is too long, at any point in the course. This does not replace the two-week non-attendance withdrawal process; it is just to ensure regular and consistent participation throughout each course. The Student Support Specialist can do outreach by phone, text, or email and offer support that eliminates barriers to successful course completion. Pass the baton, we'll take it from there!

## In what circumstances would an instructor be contacted by a student support specialist?

There are a few! Most often you would hear from a Student Support Specialist out of concern for a student's progress or performance. We know that a student may be working directly with instructors and you may have more updated information than us about a student's academic progress and intentions. We may also be asking you questions about an Incomplete Grade request, textbook, or course related information. If a student is having difficulty reaching you, they may ask us to help. Often, we find communication barriers are a result of using Brightspace messaging or emails outside of sjcme.edu. Our goal is to initiate and facilitate open communication that leads a student to successful course completion as can reasonably be

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expected considering the instructor's insights and recommendations. To increase support, transparency, and problem solving, Program Directors should be included in all correspondence of this nature, as they are involved in making non-attendance withdrawal decisions.

## **What is the difference between an extension and an incomplete grade?**

SJC no longer offers course extensions. The Incomplete Grade policy replaced extensions, and there is an eligibility requirement. To be approved for more time in a course, a student must have experienced a severe extenuating circumstance and be current with their coursework at the time they apply for the Incomplete Grade. The link and application is only available through the Student Support Specialist, who does an initial screening for eligibility. Ultimately, the approval/denial is up to the instructor and program director. A student should only be "offered" an incomplete grade as an option if they disclose a serious situation, not as a general offering to an entire class. Instructors should review each situation with the Program Director prior to and during the application process in Sharepoint. Denial of a request is completely feasible during this review. If approved, it is helpful to establish new due dates and work must be submitted regularly, not all at once at the end of the incomplete period. The maximum allowed time is 4 weeks beyond the original end date, but it is in everyone's best interests to only offer as much additional time as needed. Please find more information about incompletes in the Instructor & Student Support Collaboration document or discuss with your Program Director.

## **What counts as participation?**

Substantive coursework. For SJC to say that a student is enrolled and active in a course, gradable substantive coursework must have been submitted within the first two weeks and then consistently throughout the term. The work does not need to have been graded already, just counting towards a final grade. Generally, introduction posts "Hi my name is..." are not gradable and do not count as participation, although each course may be different. An "F" entered for non-submitted work also does not count as substantive coursework, nor do emails between instructors and learners. A plan or intention to complete future work is not enough to keep the student enrolled, but gradable work submitted in Dropbox, a quiz, or in discussions *will*, as long as it is in the students best interest to remain enrolled. You can always work this out with your PD and the Student Support Specialist.

## **Can I give a student extra time to complete an assignment?**

Generally, yes. Flexibility within a course rests with each instructor and student. If you feel that the student's reason for needing a little additional time is warranted, you can work out an individualized plan that balances compassion and accountability. Usually this is a few days at most. We have seen great success with setting a specific deadline and holding the student to it. *"I am okay with giving you three additional days, so if your work is not submitted by Friday, I will have to enter an F for this assignment..."*. This helps keep the student on track and prevents lack of participation from snowballing, which can ultimately make course completion impossible.

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**Exception--** The 3-5 business days between the official end of week two and when lists of non-participating students are due is a tricky spot to allow additional time. If you keep a student in the course who hasn't done work, they are reported as enrolled to outside entities. If they don't submit work as planned and decide to withdraw from the course in the future, we do not have a last participation date. This becomes a significant compliance issue and can also have negative financial implications for the student.

**Suggestion:** Alert the student *and* Student Support Specialist a few days prior to the end of week two: *"You have until xx/xx to submit work or you will be withdrawn from the course for non-participation"* and then we must stick to it. Please work directly with your Program Director for guidance in these tricky situations.

## What resources are available to online instructors and students?

It is always best to include the Student Support Specialist on any communications with referral to additional resources. It helps the student when they are taking other courses in the future. ACE (Academic Center for Excellence) is the best place to start. There is support for writing, ELL, ADA, as well as online tutoring. These resources are accessible in each course in Brightspace (usually right hand side if you scroll down) or can be found via MySJC under Academic Resources: <https://my.sjcme.edu/resources/student-services/online-student/>. We have found that it is best to send students in this general direction and let them and ACE find the best resource for their barrier(s).

We have found that the [Wellehan Library](#) website or [askalibrarian@sjcme.edu](mailto:askalibrarian@sjcme.edu) is a great resource for things like APA/MLA formatting, research, creating presentations, using infographics, or accessing other types of technology that are useful for coursework or instruction.

Lastly, we direct students to [MySJC](#) as a comprehensive one-stop-shopping dashboard for available resources. All links and information will be updated frequently and students may stumble on a resource they didn't know existed! The Course Catalog houses important online academic policies and our academic calendar. It is updated every July, so it is important to review for changes and refresh any links.

## What are common reasons online students withdraw?

When working with mostly post-traditional students, we see a lot of reasons for withdrawal. Most often it is related to "too much on my plate" with commitments to work, family, or other financial priorities. Sometimes students find that the online experience is not what they imagined it would be. The biggest tool for retention is engagement of all those involved with students. "Online" is hard, but a little easier if students know they are not alone.

To officially withdraw from a course or program a student must request a form through their Student Support Specialist. We work with them to identify barriers and determine if remaining enrolled or withdrawing is best.

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## **When can I release final grades?**

On or after the official course end date. Any final grade released prior to the end date must be manually removed and entered back into Campus Cafe. If a final grade is entered at week 8 for a 10-week course, it presents multiple issues related to reporting official enrollment, financial aid eligibility, and implied course rigor. No courses are exempt, and we cannot edit an end date.